

Leveller organisation and the dynamic of the English Revolution

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Declaration

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Abstract

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The purpose of this thesis is to establish the extent and effectiveness of Leveller organisation in the English Revolution. The debate among historians of the English Revolution will be examined in order to locate this work in an historical context. The aim of the thesis is to challenge those currents of thought among historians which have sought to argue that the Levellers were of little or no significance in explaining the events of the 1640s.

The pre-existing networks of collective organisation will be examined in order to highlight the degree of political co-ordination among individuals who were to become central to the emergence of the Leveller movement. An analysis of the use of public space, print and petitioning will aim to reveal the nature and reach of organised political activity by the Levellers.

An investigation of the networks of support in the localities of London, the gathered Churches and the New Model Army will demonstrate the levels of support that the Levellers enjoyed. The way in which the opponents of the Levellers sought to suppress

the movement will be discussed with a view to assessing the threat to the dominant political forces of the revolution. But, equally, crucial moments of co-operation between the Levellers and their sometime opponents among the political Independents will be assessed as crucial in shaping the eventual outcome of the revolution in its critical year, 1648.

The conclusion of the thesis is that the Levellers developed a unique collective organisation which, while it was only ever a minority current even within the revolutionary camp, was a crucial component of the political bloc which defeated the drive for a Personal Treaty with the King in 1648 and therefore opened the path to the establishment of a Republic.

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Abbreviations

For the ease of readers in following footnotes I have preferred fuller citations and have minimised the use of abbreviations. Abbreviations regularly used are as follows:

Bod.: Bodleian Library

BL: British Library

CSPD: Calendar of State Papers Domestic

CUP: Cambridge University Press

DWL: Dr. Williams Library

HLMP: House of Lords Main Papers

HMC: Historical Manuscripts Commission

LMA: London Metropolitan Archive

MECW: Marx Engels Collected Works

MUP: Manchester University Press

ODNB: The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

OUP: Oxford University Press

PRO: Public Records Office

STC: Short Title Catalogue. A Pollard and G Redgrave, *A short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland and Ireland, and of English books printed abroad 1475-1640*.

STC (2nd. ed.): *A short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland and Ireland, and of English books printed abroad 1475-1640*. Second edition, revised and enlarged, begun by W Jackson and F Fergusson, completed by K Pantzer

TNA: The National Archive

Wing: D, Wing, *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British America and of the English Books Printed in Other Countries, 1641-1700* (1945–1951)

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to describe some ways in which the Levellers were an historically significant political organisation. This will involve both a description of the extent of Leveller political activity and of the effect of that activity on the course of the English revolution. The proposition that the Levellers were an identifiable and effective political organisation is, of course, not one that is accepted by some modern historians who are unwilling to acknowledge their existence as a political movement or their impact on the events of the 1640s.

Critical to the development of this strand of modern scholarship has been Mark Kishlansky's view that the Levellers were marginal to the events of the revolution. In *The Rise of the New Model Army* Kishlansky took the authorial decision to 'give scant attention' to 'political radicalism during this period'. He elaborated on this choice by saying:

The decision to exclude the Levellers was a more difficult one... The source materials leave little impression of radical infiltration or leadership, but recent historiography has raised the Levellers to fantastic heights. They are nothing less than the *deus ex machina* in explanations of the Revolution. I have attempted to deal more explicitly with this problem... elsewhere.¹

Whatever we may think of this approach, *The Rise of the New Model Army* did not deal with the events after 1647. Neither did the essays to which Kishlansky refers.² Kishlansky did have the chance to address the issue of the later role of the Levellers in his *A Monarchy Transformed*. But here too it is only in his brief mention of the decline of Leveller organisation in 1649 that we

¹ M Kishlansky, *The Rise of the New Model Army* (Cambridge, CUP, 1979) p. x.

² M Kishlansky, 'The Army and The Levellers: The Roads to Putney', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Dec., 1979), pp. 795-824 and 'What Happened at Ware?', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Dec., 1982), pp. 827-839.

learn that ‘The impressive Leveller organization with its sea-green colours, its party dues and its newspaper, *The Moderate*, was beginning to dissolve’.³ What this ‘impressive organisation’ was doing in the previous critical year remains untold.

Other historians have taken a similar approach. John Walter regrets ‘the attention devoted to the seductive developments’ of the later 1640s ‘with the emergence of radical groups, whose status as “vanguard *political parties*” has undoubtedly been exaggerated...’.⁴ Jonathan Scott argues that ‘any notion of a “Leveller party” is misleading’ and that the ‘movement never established a large-scale organisation of its own’.⁵ Diane Purkiss says ‘The term “Leveller movement” used by historians is misleading... the Levellers were not a party or a group... certainly they did not have any kind of simple programme’.⁶ Michael Braddick is similarly sceptical of the Levellers’ ‘practical significance to the events of the 1640s’.⁷ This is a long-standing debate. When Cromwell reprieved Leveller Henry Denne from execution after the 1649 Burford mutiny Denne wrote a recantation in which he said that the Levellers were a heterogeneous body with no fixed objectives. The Levellers were defended in the pamphlet *Sea-Green and Blue* which insisted that it was perfectly possible that ‘these severall parts...should be concentrick, as to a joynt pursuance of publique ends’.⁸

This battle of interpretation has persisted in modern scholarship. Austin Woolrych’s *Soldiers and Statesmen* deployed close argument to conclude that Kishlansky’s case was ‘surely implausible’.

³ M Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed Britain 1603-1714*, (London, Penguin, 1996) p. 194.

⁴ J Walter, ‘Politicising the popular? The “Tradition of Riot” and Popular Political Culture in the English Revolution’, in N Tyacke (ed.), *The English Revolution c.1590-1720, Politics, Religion and Communities* (Manchester, MUP, 2007) p. 96.

⁵ J Scott, *England’s Troubles, Seventeenth-Century English Political Instability in European Context* (Cambridge, CUP, 2000) p. 270. Scott claims that the Levellers depended for support on groups wider than their own immediate periphery (pp. 270-271). But even many much more strictly defined modern political parties share this characteristic.

⁶ D Purkiss, *The English Civil War, A People’s History* (London, Harper Collins, 2006) p. 476. Both Scott and Purkiss, however, go on to treat the Levellers as if they *were* a coherent group despite the generalizations with which they open their analyses.

⁷ M Braddick, *God’s Fury, England’s Fire A New History of the English Civil War* (London, Penguin, 2008) p. 444.

⁸ H Denne, *The Levellers Designe Discovered* (London, 1649) E556[11]. Denne does not in fact name the Levellers in his comments which are directed at those involved in ‘this mutiny’. But the Levellers reply, and subsequent historians, have taken the remarks to be applicable to the Levellers in particular. *Sea Green and Blue, see which speaks true* (1649) p. 2. Pagination is highly erratic and this is the second page in the pamphlet with the number 2 at the top. For a brief biographical note on Denne see ‘Henry Denne’, *Baptist Quarterly*, No. 11.3-4 (July-October, 1942).

But Woolrych's study, like Kishlansky's, stopped short of the events of 1648, covering that year only briefly in its epilogue.⁹ Ian Gentles' work has done much to reassert the importance of the politicization of the New Model Army pointing out that 'there is considerable evidence of receptiveness, between 1647 and 1649, within the army, to Leveller ideas'.¹⁰ Barbara Taft, Clive Holmes, Philip Baker and Rachel Foxley have all pointed to the critical phase of co-operation between the Levellers and the Independents in the culminating months of the revolution.¹¹ Blair Worden argues that 'when Cromwell and Ireton moved against Charles I in late 1648 and early 1649 they were finally accepting the position which the Levellers had urged on them in the autumn of 1647...'. And he is at least partially correct when he argues that 'Twentieth-century historians of the Levellers, predominantly more interested in social issues than in constitutional ones, scarcely noticed that Leveller contribution to the rise of anti-monarchical feeling'. He suggests that we ask 'not how far the Levellers anticipated the values of modern times, but what impact they made on events'. In another register Jason Peacey notes of recent studies that '...the context explored has tended to be an intellectual, rather than a political one, and authors' aims are assumed to have been intellectual, philosophical and theoretical, rather than polemical and propagandistic... few works have sought to interpret non-intellectual motivations for the composition and publication of books and pamphlets, or the interaction of political writers with the day-to-day political life of the times...'.¹² Ironically perhaps even Christopher Hill's later work focused more on the ideas of the radicals than their effectiveness as political actors. This was, as C L R James pointed out, in part because the tradition from which Hill came was more

⁹ A Woolrych, *Soldiers and Statesmen, The General Council of the Army and its Debates 1647-1648* (Oxford, OUP, 1987) p. 20.

¹⁰ For the full account of the history of the New Model Army see I Gentles, *The New Model Army in England, Ireland and Scotland, 1645-1653* (Oxford, OUP, 1992) and for a discussion of Leveller influence see I Gentles, 'The Politics of Fairfax's Army, 1645-9' in J Adamson, *The English Civil War* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) pp. 173-201, esp. pp. 186-194.

¹¹ B Taft, 'The Council of Officers' Agreement of the People, 1648/9', *The Historical Journal*, Vol.28, No.1 (March, 1984) p. 171. C Holmes, *Why Was Charles I Executed?* (London, Hambledon Continuum, 2006) pp. 116-117. P Baker, 'Rhetoric, Reality and Varieties of Civil War Radicalism' in J Adamson, *The English Civil War*, p. 214. P Baker, '"A Despicable Contemptible Generation of Men"?: Cromwell and the Levellers' in P Little (ed.), *Oliver Cromwell, New Perspectives* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) pp. 90-116. R Foxley, *The Levellers, radical political thought in the English Revolution* (Manchester, MUP, 2013) pp. 150-194.

¹² B Worden, *Roundhead Reputations, The English Civil Wars and the Passions of Posterity* (London, Penguin, 2001) p. 338. J Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers, Propaganda During the English Civil Wars and Interregnum* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004) pp. 7-8.

interested in the Diggers as precursors of Communist thought than in the Levellers as a practical political organisation.¹³

Yet the Levellers were first and foremost political activists. A central argument of this thesis is that they were an effective political movement. In order to recognise this however we must depart from the simple binary opposition of ‘outside agitator/spontaneous material grievance’ with which Kishlansky approaches the Levellers. It is common in revolutionary crises that there is a growing together of, on the one hand, radicalized popular forces and, on the other, a minority of previously radicalized individuals who form an organisation. There occurs an interaction in which the radicalizing mass influences the body of organised activists and the body of activists influences and shapes the process of radicalization.¹⁴ This is precisely the relationship between the Levellers and the radical forces among the supporters of Parliament in 1640s. The Levellers were not the ‘God outside the machine’, as Kishlansky has it, rather they were an organised machine among the Godly.

In the first chapter I seek to review the historical literature concerning the Levellers, to show that the trend which diminishes their influence is a relatively recent approach that runs counter to the larger body of historical writing about radicals in the English revolution. This involves an examination of recent writing that has been critical of revisionism. I also seek to demonstrate the social and political context which gave rise to revisionism.

The Levellers did not, because no movement does, emerge fully formed. They had a pre-history. Before the Levellers became an identifiable movement, and certainly before they were given a name, the leading figures had a considerable record of political activism. Moreover this activism

¹³ C Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London, Penguin, 1972) which tends to dissolve specifically Leveller influence into a ‘vaster and more incoherent’ movement in the Army and, later, into the history of the Diggers. See pp. 64-72 and Ch. 7. C L R James (writing as G F Eckstein), ‘Ancestors of the Proletariat’ in *Fourth International*, Vol.10 No.8, September 1949, pp. 252-255 (available at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1949/09/english-revolution.htm>). Also see ‘Cromwell and the Levellers’, *Fourth International*, Vol. 10, No.5, May 1949, pp. 143-148 (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1949/05/english-revolution.htm>). See also J Gurney, Gerrard Winstanley (London, Pluto, 2013) p. 118-119.

¹⁴ For instance, between the Jacobins and the popular movement in the French Revolution or the Bolshevik party and the workers of St Petersburg in the Russian Revolution. See among much other work A Soboul, *The French Revolution 1787-1799* (London, Unwin Hyman, 1974) pp. 326-344 and pp. 382-383 and S A Smith, *Red Petrograd, Revolution in the Factories* (Cambridge, CUP, 1983), esp Ch. 9.

was not simply that of isolated individuals. It was the kind of political activity that required a degree of collective political organisation. In chapter 2 on the Levellers and public space I look at one aspect of the preconditions of the Leveller movement and how this shaped its later development. In the densely packed streets of the walled City of London, in the Artillery fields that lay beyond the walls, in the gathered churches and in the ale houses and taverns, networks and oppositional currents formed within which the Leveller movement incubated. These networks were perhaps more widespread and more radical than some historians have accepted. They were not, in the early phases of the revolution, politically differentiated in the way they became in the mid-1640s. But they did provide an early form of association and action for those who were to become Levellers. Moreover, these patterns of work and association lasted into the period in which the Levellers emerged as a distinct political formation. These were a more or less permanent foundation on which the movement rested.

As this was happening the dynamic of the revolution posed new problems, dissolving some political alliances and making others possible. The future Levellers began political activity as part of the broad Parliamentary alliance, became advocates of the win-the-war party, became allies of the Independents and, as new conditions arose, became more distinct ideologically and organisationally until they were so recognisable that their opponents gave them a name.

Lilburne himself commented on the successive phases of development within the revolutionary camp in *The Innocent Man's Second Proffer*, which I examine further in the final chapter.¹⁵ As these stages of revolutionary activity succeeded each other the originally separate strands of activity by future Levellers began to merge. Lilburne, Overton and Larner co-operated from the early 1640s. Lilburne and Walwyn came together in 1645 when the Salter's Hall group met with Lilburne's supporters in the Windmill tavern. Wildman and Rainsborough were working with Lilburne around the time of the Putney debates. These are only some of the strands and connections that formed the Levellers. These individuals did not all know each other at first. But they came to, and they came to co-operate openly and collectively. It is possible to describe a number of circles within which the future leaders of the Levellers made contact with one

¹⁵ J Lilburne, *The Innocent Man's Second Proffer* (London, 1649).

another. Most obviously these include the streets, taverns, gathered churches and the apprentice networks of the City of London. But it would take more than physical proximity and common meeting places to transform individual activists into a recognisable collective entity. Illegal printing was a critical narrower environment which led in this direction. In the first phase of the revolution individuals who were later to be prominent in the Leveller movement were running illegal printing presses, circulating petitions and organising protests in support of them. In chapter 3 I argue that it was printing that brought John Lilburne and his supporters together in specifically organised relationships long before they became known as Levellers.

William Larner, one of the central figures in Leveller printing, had known Lilburne at least from 1641 when he published the story of Lilburne's first persecution, *The Christian Man's Triall*.¹⁶ Larner was at this time already in contact with Richard Overton.¹⁷ Moving in the same strata and known to Larner were Leveller supporter Katherine Chidley and her son Samuel Chidley, a future Leveller treasurer. Samuel himself already knew Lilburne from the 1630s.¹⁸ Another Leveller printer Thomas Paine was active in the same circles.¹⁹ Larner was already known to William Walwyn and later printed his work. John Lilburne originally arranged Henry Hills' apprenticeship in the printing trade in 1642. Hills already knew Thomas Paine. Hills later became co-printer at the Army press organised by Edward Sexby with John Harris who edited the most radical of the Leveller newsheets, *Mercurius Militaris*, in 1648.²⁰ It is from such contact that the embryo of an organisation emerged.

¹⁶ J Lilburne, *The Christian Man's Triall* (London, 1641). E181[7]. In January 1641 Larner also had printed the remarkable *To the Honourable The House of Commons Assembled in Parliament...*, 669 f.4[54]. For a further discussion of this petition see 'The Levellers and petitioning' chapter of this thesis.

¹⁷ K Lindley, *Popular Politics and Religion in Civil War* (Aldershot, Scolar, 1997) pp. 393-394.

¹⁸ K Chidley, *The Justification of the Independent Churches* was printed by William Larner in 1641. See also P R S Baker, 'William Larner', ODNB. S Chidley, *The Dissembling Scot* (London, 1652) p4. E652[13]. I J Gentles, 'Samuel Chidley', ODNB.

¹⁹ D Como, 'Print, Censorship, and Ideological Escalation in the English Civil War', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (October 2012) p. 831.

²⁰ See *A view of part of the many Traiterous, Disloyal and Turn-about Actions of H H Senior* (1684). Wing (CD-Rom) V359. I Gadd, ODNB. R L Greaves and R Zaller, *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century*, Vol. II, (Brighton, Harvester, 1984) pp. 91-92. M Mendle, 'Putney's pronouns: identity and indemnity in the great debate' in M Mendle (ed), *The Putney Debates of 1647* (Cambridge, CUP, 2001) pp. 126-133.

This kind of early contact between future Leveller leaders required a degree of trust essential to running a secret press. Sustaining an illegal press was a complex enterprise needing collective organisation.²¹ Overton and Larner were both running such operations in the early 1640s. And we can add to this that similar organised networks were necessary for the distribution of printed material. These were many and various ranging from the a man who ‘lurks around Gray’s Inn in a satin doublet...with a cloak bag full of books...’ who Archbishop Laud was trying to track down for distributing a pamphlet, possibly of Overton’s production, in 1642, to sympathetic booksellers like the Mr Browne and his daughter who attracted the Stationers’ beagles for selling books supplied by Lilburne in his shop and on the street, to friendly taverns like the Saracen’s Head in Friday Street where John Wildman lodged, to sympathetic churches and soldiers in the army.²² The extent of Leveller printing and distribution expanded in the later 1640s. But the rudimentary organisation, and many of the personnel involved, dated back to the early 1640s. What is understated in many recent accounts is the degree to which this kind of activity provided the skeleton around which the Leveller movement formed.

Chapter 5 examines an equally important activity that formed the basis of the Leveller movement: petitioning. Even petitions wholly within the accepted norms of a hierarchical society require a minimum of collective organisation. Petitions must be formulated, written, delivered and the support of backers organised.²³ Printing petitions transformed these activities into mass politics. Multiple copies could be circulated, often distributed in the streets at night, given away at Westminster or pinned to Church doors.²⁴ An early example, from January 1641, is a petition printed for William Larner. The petition is directed against the House of Lords threatens that, if the Commons do not act, ‘your Petitioners shall not rest in quietness, but shall be inforced to lay hold on the next remedy which is at hand, to remove the disturbers of our

²¹ D Como, ‘Secret Printing, the Crisis of 1640 and the Origins of Civil War Radicalism’, *Past and Present*, No. 196 (August, 2007) p. 52.

²² TNA: PRO, SP 16/467 f.16. *The humble petition of Joseph Hunscoth Stationer...*, pp3-7. E340[15]. See J Wildman, *Truth’s Triumph* (London, 1648) p. 5.

²³ Bod., Tanner MSS, Vol. 67, folios, 193 and 194. We catch a glimpse of some of the organisation needed even in the pre-revolutionary ‘Complaint of Journeymen Against Master Printers’, which I examine in chapter 5. .

²⁴ See G K Fortescue, Preface, *British Museum Catalogue of Thomason Tracts 1640-1652*, Vol. I (London, British Museum, 1908) p. xxiii.

peace, want, and necessity, breaking the bounds of modesty'. The printed instruction on the petition provide for a specific organised political demonstrations for its presentation to Parliament.²⁵ Thus from an early stage petitioning was linked to popular mobilisation. Indeed the very signing of petitions was a mass activity in some cases, for instance, at Blackheath, Southwark and St. George's Fields.²⁶ Many more Leveller petitions followed Lerner's early example. In the campaign around the Petition of March 1647 the Levellers were at the doors of Parliament half a dozen times, with four petitions and a printed statement in just two and a half months.²⁷

This was work carried out on a considerable scale. In January 1648 it was claimed that 30,000 copies of a Leveller petition were being printed for widespread distribution.²⁸ The same year opponents of the Levellers were complaining of Leveller plans to print 3,000 copies of a petition.²⁹ *The Remonstrance of Many Thousands of the Free-People of England...and those called Levelers* claimed this 'is already signed by 98064 hands, and more to be added daily'.³⁰ Lilburne claimed that two publications in 1649, the *Manifestation* and *The Agreement of the People* of 1st May, had a print run of 20,000 which were sent 'gratis all over England'.³¹ In March 1649 *The Humble Petition of Divers wel-affected Women*, a plea to free Lilburne, Walwyn, Prince and Overton from their imprisonment in the Tower collected 10,000 names using women ward organisers.³² In May 1649 Leveller-supporting apprentices in the Cripplegate Without ward were using the same method.³³ Petitions were reproduced in broadsheets. *The Moderate* regularly reproduced Leveller

²⁵ Anon, 'To the Honourable The House of Commons Assembled in Parliament...', 669 f.4[54]. Also see, for instance, Anon, 'You that are Subscribers to the Apprentices Petition...'. E83[46]. This is misallocated in Early English Books Online.

²⁶ Sir Thomas Aston, The Collector to the Reader in 'A Collection of Sundry Petitions...', E150[28].

²⁷ D. Wolfe, *Leveller Manifestoes of the Puritan Revolution* (London, Frank Cass, 1967) p. 134.

²⁸ G. Masterson, *A Declaration of Some Proceedings of Lt. Col. John Lilburne...* p. 17. E427[6].

²⁹ G. Masterson, *A Declaration and some Proceedings...* Also see D Zaret, 'Petitions and the "Invention" of Public Opinion in the English Revolution', *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 101, No.6 (May, 1996) p. 1526.

³⁰ *The Remonstrance of Many Thousands of the Free-People of England...and those called Levelers*, p8. E574[15]. Although the figure of nearly 100,000 signatories is very high given a national population figure of less than 6 million.

³¹ J Lilburne, *Apologetical Narration* (Amsterdam, 1652) p. 71.

³² Anon, *To the Supream Authority of this Nation...The Humble Petition of Divers wel-affected Women*. E551[14].

³³ *The thankfull acknowledgement...* (London, 6 May 1649).

petitions, helped to organise support for them and reported on their fate.³⁴ All this speaks of a high degree of organisational co-ordination, both in the presentation of the petitions and in their subsequent printing and distribution.³⁵ The Levellers did not invent and were not alone in undertaking this kind of activity. But they are significant in being an organised current that could repeatedly mass petition on this scale over a relatively long time period. Printing and petitioning were both activities that required distinct political organisation.

Political activity in the army also required the ability to work both within and separately from alliances with other forces. Chapter 6 and, in part, Chapter 7 are concerned with the army, as a third environment in which future Levellers met and organised collectively. It was also a field of operation in which internally arising radical currents reached out to the Levellers, and where the Levellers were simultaneously seeking to reach out to these newly arising currents of opposition. Chapter 6 deals with the death and funeral of Colonel Thomas Rainsborough, the highest ranking army officer identified with the Leveller cause. Rainsborough's death was symbolic of a decisive political moment. It marked a specifically Leveller contribution to the culmination of the revolution.

These chapters challenge the view that the Levellers did not have support in the army, examining the effect of petitions and other publications on soldiers. But the argument is also made that the Levellers themselves were part of the army, not entirely exterior to it. For instance, John Lilburne's military exploits were well known and he and others continued to address him by his military rank even after he left the Army. Indeed, when the Lords failed to refer to Lilburne using his military rank in the year after he left the army Overton reproved them in print.³⁶ Other Levellers also saw military service: William Allen, William Larnier, Thomas Prince, John Harris, Major Tulidah, John Cobbett, John Rede, and Tobias Box, to

³⁴ For example, at the height of the petitioning campaign in 1648 *The Moderate* was reproducing at least one, and usually more, petition in every issue. Petitions from Oxfordshire and Leicestershire are reported and reprinted in the *The Moderate* for 26 September-3 October 1648. E465[25]; from Army garrisons in *The Moderate* for 3 October-10 October 1648. E467[1]; from Newcastle and Hull in *The Moderate* for 10 October-17 October 1648. E468[2]; from Ireton's Regiment in *The Moderate* for 17 October-24 October 1648. E468[24].

³⁵ *The Humble Petition of the Well Affected Young Men and Apprentices of the City of London*, E399[2].

³⁶ R Overton, *An Alarum to the House of Lords* (London, 1646) p. 3. E346[8].

name only some. Henry Marten raised his own regiment in Berkshire. Thomas Rainsborough, his brother William, agitator Edward Sexby and Army chaplains Jeremiah Ives and Edward Harrison supported the Levellers. So did leading figures in the mutinies at Ware, Bishopsgate and Burford. Captains William Eyre and William Bray were the Levellers instrumental in the Ware mutiny. Eyre was also at Burford. Stephen Winthrop, Captain in the regiment of Thomas Rainsborough, his late kinsman, joined that mutiny. Captain William Thompson, one of the central figures in the Burford revolt, was a convinced Leveller. The Bishopsgate revolt was led by Robert Lockyer whose funeral was an impressive demonstration of Leveller support.

Military service created bonds of comradeship and networks of influence which lasted well beyond the time that any particular individual spent in the army. This kind of influence did not create army radicalism. It took both immediate material grievances and a society-wide political crisis to do that. But they did help shape the exact directions that such radicalism took. Right at the beginning of the Ware mutiny in November 1647 we see an interaction between Leveller organisation and internally arising revolt. Captain William Bray was an Army veteran, a confederate of Edward Sexby and John Lilburne and a supporter of the *Agreement of the People*.³⁷ According to his account the mutiny began as a powerful elemental revolt. But when Bray was trying to direct the explosion of anger in the ranks he suggested that the troops ‘send a faire letter to the Agents from the five Regiments of Horse, and to get an Order from them’.³⁸ This shows a connection with the new Agitators elected under Lilburne’s influence. It is not the only such connection. Bray was arrested when the mutinous regiment appeared on the field at Ware, but he obviously still enjoyed support among the troops in 1649 when they petitioned for his release, citing their support for the Levellers.³⁹ William Eyre was one of the key Leveller figures at Ware and at Burford. His political trajectory and his Leveller allies are an important thread in the tapestry of army militancy. Eyre had, like Lilburne, fought at Brentford, was befriended by Cromwell, as was Lilburne, and became a Captain in his regiment. But he became an advocate

³⁷ W Bray, *A Representation to the Nation* (London, 1648). W Bray, *A Letter to the General* (London, nd, but probably 1649) pp4-6. W Bray, *Innocency and the Blood of the slain Souldiers* (London, 1649) pp11, 17. W Bray, *A Letter to His Excellencie Sir Thomas Fairfax* (London, 1647) p. 3.

³⁸ *The Justice of the Army...* (London, 1649) p. 4.

³⁹ J Naylier, *The Foxes Craft Discovered* (London, 1649) pp. 6-7.

of the full Leveller programme.⁴⁰ Eyre's name appears in the secret code written in Henry Marten's hand, indicating a trusted network of close collaborators whose business was primarily to exert political influence in, and communicate information about, the Army.⁴¹

In the conditions of civil war, events in the army were never separate from broader political developments. The Ware mutiny, for instance, did not happen in isolation. It arose in the midst of a wave of agitation around the edition of the *Agreement of the People* published on 3 November 1647. The question should not only be the one that Kishlansky asks, 'What Happened at Ware?', but also 'What was Happening at the time of Ware?' The Royalist press complained of Petitions 'framed in the Army and sent abroad by the Agitators into those Counties and Cities' where they were taken up by Sectaries. The Commons ordered a committee to investigate the business of the 'London agents' who had 'fomented and abetted' the mutiny.⁴² There were meetings held in Mile End and papers 'dispersed upon and down the city' to gather weavers to march to Ware in support of the Leveller cause, though these plans were thwarted.⁴³ There were bills posted up 'in many Churches, and upon severall Gates and Ports throughout the City, inciting the People to rise as one Man, and free themselves from the Tyranny of their Task-Masters at Westminster'. Henry Marten defended those who did it. Lilburne and Chidley were at Ware, and perhaps Overton joined them.⁴⁴ It was a commonplace in the newsbooks and pamphlets that the Agitators were 'begotten of Lilburne (with Overtons help)...counselled by Walwin' and 'patronised by Mr Martin'.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ W Eyre, *The Serious Representation of Col. William Eyre* (1649). E394[5A]. P Gregg, *Free-born John* (London, Dent, 1961) p. 222.

⁴¹ BL, *Henry Marten Papers*, Add. MS 71532. f.23. This is discussed more fully in chapter 6.

⁴² *Mercurius Rusticus* (London, 1647) this edition contains no printed date but is annotated by Thomason as 12 November 1647 E414[5]. *Perfect Occurrences*, 12-19 November 1647 (London) p. 318. *Mercurius Elencticus*, 12-19 November 1647 (London) p.24. E416[13]. P Gregg, *Free-born John*, p. 224.

⁴³ *A New Declaration from Eight Regiments in the Army* (London, 1647) pp. 2-3. MPs were also meeting with the weavers about their grievances at the same time, See *Perfect Occurrences*, 12-19 November 1647 (London) p. 317.

⁴⁴ *To the Supream authority of England, the Commons in Parliament assembled...* (London, 1647). W Clarke, prefatory note to *A full relation of the proceedings...* (1647) p. 6. *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, 16-22 November 1647 (London) p. 73.

⁴⁵ *The Character of an Agitator*, dated 11th November 1647, p. 7. See also *Mercurius Melancholicus*, 13-20 November 1647, p. 73.

Three elements are necessary to re-evaluate the role of the Levellers. The first is to uncover the sheer scale of Leveller activity. The second is to assess the relationship of the Levellers to other forces on the radical end of the spectrum of parliamentary forces, a task which a number of recent studies have begun. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 examine these aspects of Leveller organisation. The third necessary task is to look at the Levellers and their allies within the conjuncture that existed in 1648 at the culmination of the revolutionary crisis. Chapters 5 and 6 concentrate on the organizational weight that the Levellers were able to deploy in the critical year 1648. In addition Chapter 6 examines the strength of the Levellers after the alliance with the Independents fractured in the wake of the execution of the King in 1649. This fracture revealed that the Levellers were considerably, indeed fatally, weaker once this understanding was broken. But the remaining reserves of strength in the movement also served to underline what the Levellers had contributed to the alliance when it was functioning.

An important source of information about Leveller organisation at this time comes from an account of a meeting in Wapping addressed by John Lilburne and John Wildman called to promote a petition on the 17 January 1648.⁴⁶ George Masterson, a Presbyterian minister from Shoreditch parish, was there to spy and the following day he denounced the meeting as a traitorous conspiracy to both the Lords and Commons.⁴⁷ Masterson's account of the Wapping meeting, and Lilburne and Wildman's responses, gives us our most detailed picture of how the Levellers and their supporters organized.⁴⁸ What emerges is an account of the Levellers which shows them having thrice-weekly organizing meetings in the Whalebone tavern in the City and other meetings in the suburbs beyond the City walls and still more as far afield as Kent. 'Commissioners' or 'Agents' were appointed to organise Leveller activity. Samuel Chidley and Thomas Prince were agreed as treasurers to collect regular dues to finance the printing and distribution of petitions and to fund other work. The Levellers were printing petitions in thousands, sometimes tens of thousands. These are print runs that would be respectable for a

⁴⁶ J Lilburne, *An Impeachment for High Treason against Oliver Cromwell and his son in law Henry Ireton Esquires* (London, 1649). E568[20].

⁴⁷ W Haller and G Davies, *The Leveller Tracts 1647-53* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1944) pp. 88-89. See also N Carlin, 'Leveller Organization in London', *The Historical Journal*, 27, 4 (1984) pp. 955-960.

⁴⁸ N Carlin, 'Leveller Organization in London', especially pp.958-960.

radical petition campaign in modern Britain, let alone a society whose audience was a fraction of today's population.⁴⁹

The Wapping meeting is not the only indicator of Leveller activity. The same kind of organisation stood behind the Large Petition of 11 September 1648, perhaps the most important of all Leveller petitions. For much of 1648 a popularly supported Treaty between Parliament and King threatened to end the revolution on Royalist terms. Leveller activity was critical in turning this pro-Treaty tide. The influence of the Large Petition on other petitions was considerable.⁵⁰ Analysis of the 64 surviving petitions for this period show a high proportion that directly support the Leveller petition or reproduce its demands in whole or part.⁵¹

This organisation was a vital element in the final phase of the revolution. Besides the Levellers, the Independents around Cromwell and Ireton were the main force resisting efforts to 're-inthroned' the King.⁵² In early September 1648 Edmund Ludlow had already visited Henry Ireton at the siege of Colchester to encourage him to act against the King. Ludlow could not convince Ireton to act before a Treaty was concluded between Parliament and the King.⁵³ But by the 27 September Ireton wrote a long letter to Lord Fairfax expressing his changed view that action was now vital.⁵⁴ Fairfax was opposed to any radical action and Ireton withdrew from the Army headquarters to Windsor and, subsequently, tendered his resignation.⁵⁵ And although Ireton's resignation was not accepted, he could find no way forward other than to form an alliance with the Levellers.

⁴⁹ *A Declaration and Some Proceedings*, E427(6), and also W Haller and G Davies, pp. 98-101. See P Gregg, *Free-Born John*, pp.229-231. Lilburne's transcription of his own speech at the bar of the House of Commons on 19th January 1648 told the same story: J Lilburne, *An Impeachment for High Treason* (London, 1649) E568[20]. See also N Carlin, 'Leveller Organisation in London', pp. 959-960.

⁵⁰ R Ashton, *Counter Revolution, The Second Civil War and its Origins, 1646-8* (New Haven, Yale, 1994) p. 157.

⁵¹ N Carlin, 'Petitions and Revolution in England, September 1648-January 1649'. I am extremely grateful to Norah Carlin for letting me read this unpublished study.

⁵² The term 're-inthroned' comes from a petition of Ireton's regiment. See *A True Copy of a Petition...by the Officers and Soldiers of the Regiment under the Command of Commissary General Ireton*, E468[18].

⁵³ E Ludlow, *Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1894) pp. 203-204. See chapter 5 for further discussion of this passage.

⁵⁴ D Farr, *Henry Ireton and the English Revolution* (Woodbridge, Boydell, 2006) p. 130.

⁵⁵ J Lilburne, *Legall and Fundamental Liberties*, E567[1], W Haller and G Davies, p. 417. See D Farr, *Henry Ireton...*, p130. See also R M Ramsey, *Henry Ireton* (London, Longmans, 1949) pp. 110-114.

The London radicals and the agitators produced some 40 pamphlets in 1647 and the same number again in 1648, compared to just 14 in 1645, despite new laws passed in September 1647 that were meant to crack down on unlicensed pamphlets by imposing stiffer sanctions on authors, printers, booksellers and hawkers.⁵⁶ In addition *The Moderate* and *Mercurius Militaris* began publication in 1648. Ian Gentles describes the radical alliance that was defending the revolutionary cause in London in 1648 as ‘a coalition of Independents, religious separatists and Levellers’. They were part of the ‘cohort of anonymous pamphleteers and petition organizers who sprang into action each time the majority in the court of common council took an anti-army stance’.⁵⁷

In July the Levellers gained 10,000 names for the petition to free Lilburne from the Tower and, in August and September, 40,000 signatories for the Large Petition.⁵⁸ It is likely that these networks were used in the preparation of Rainsborough’s funeral in November 1648. Indeed it is hard to see how the scale of mobilization and its organized character could have been achieved without the kind of effort that Lilburne describes. On the day after Rainsborough’s funeral Independents and Levellers met at the Nags Head to co-ordinate activity in the final phase of the revolution. The picture of the Levellers that emerges is one of sustained, methodical, widespread political organization. It was Leveller organisation that provided a vital element in the radical alliance that made the final phase of the revolution unfold as it did.

⁵⁶ P Gregg, *Free-born John*, pp. 242-43.

⁵⁷ I Gentles, ‘The Struggle for London in the Second Civil War’, pp. 282-283. Gentles also notes ‘A high number of Londoners were concentrated in the foot regiments of Thomas Pride, John Barkstead, Thomas Rainborow and John Hewson, all of them City or suburban men.’ See also D Underdown, *Prides Purge, Politics in the Puritan Revolution* (Oxford, OUP, 1971) p107: ‘The combination of religious fervor and democratic politics strikes the authentic Leveller note of 1648. The mobilization of this kind of sentiment through petitions from Army regiments, counties, and boroughs forms one more continuous theme of the months before the Purge. Lacking the kind of rudimentary political organisation the radicals possessed through the Army and County committees, the moderates could mount no retaliatory propaganda campaign. All they could do was press on with the Treaty, and hope that the nation could be reunited before the radicals had settled a course of action.’

⁵⁸ J Frank, *The Levellers, A History of the Writings of Three Seventeenth Century Social Democrats John Lilburne, Richard Overton, William Wahyn* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard, 1955) p. 167.

Conclusion

An examination of Leveller activity during English revolution prompts a number of conclusions. Firstly, Leveller organisation emerged from networks established in the early 1640s. But the organizational capacity of the Levellers grew over time. By 1648 both *The Moderate* and *Mercurius Militaris* were propagating Leveller ideas, strategy and organisation. Pamphlet production was as great as it had ever been. The presentation of the Large Petition showed Leveller activity on this front was more effective than ever.

Secondly, the political crisis of 1648 provided a unique correlation of forces within which Leveller organisation could affect the course of national politics. The increasingly bitter divisions of the Second Civil War, the consequent mounting hostility to the King among radical supporters of Parliament, the antipathy of these same forces to a Treaty with the King and toward those attempting to foster one, the impasse of the senior radical officers in the New Model Army, all created conditions in which Leveller organisation could play a critical role.

Thirdly, Rainsborough's funeral was a symbolic event in which these tensions were exposed. The hostility to him from Royalists, the anger at those on the Parliamentary side who were seen to have been negligent in allowing (or worse) his murder, the outpouring of demands for justice all exemplified, and were consciously linked to, a more general demand for an end to Treaty negotiations, for compromisers to be pushed aside, for justice to be done in a settlement of the nation. Rainsborough's funeral was a moment in which the Levellers' political standing was displayed and enhanced precisely because these were sentiments with which they had long been associated.

Finally, the Levellers and the radical Independents fashioned in this period a working alliance without which the revolution of Pride's Purge and the execution of the King would have been considerably less likely. The alliance was the joint work of, for different reasons, Cromwell, Ireton, Lilburne and the Leveller leadership. Forging this alliance required considerable effort on both sides. What the Levellers brought to this alliance was a degree of ideological clarity and an organised political force. This force did not need to be overwhelming, and it did not need to

be greater than the weight of its Independent allies. But in a situation where the Independents faced a political deadlock it needed to be enough to tip the balance. The results were not what either side imagined they would be~but without this alliance the probability must be that events would have turned in a direction that neither side wanted: the ‘re-inthroning’, to use the telling phrase of Ireton’s regiment, of the King. Leveller activity was important in avoiding the counter-revolution that threatened through much of 1648. The revolution that did happen was not the revolution the Levellers wanted, but it was to a significant degree a result of their activity. The Independent-Leveller alliance was the necessary condition of the revolution. Once success broke it apart the Levellers were isolated and, despite their continued ability to mobilise some support, defeated.

Chapter 1

The Levellers and the historians: a literature review

Literary arguments about the Levellers and English Revolution are as old as the revolution itself. The Levellers and their opponents were famously prone to print. And before the dust had settled Royalists, Cromwellian publicists and Leveller sympathisers were all justifying the actions of their co-thinkers. Debate has hardly abated since. It might seem an obvious point but the first barrier to the transmission of the history of the Levellers was the political reaction that culminated in the Restoration. The Levellers suffered persecution and political exclusion from the first days of the Republican regime. John Lilburne spent most of the 1650s in exile or in jail. Edward Sexby died in the Tower under Cromwell. William Walwyn had quietly slipped back into private life. Richard Overton disappeared from prominence.

The restoration of the monarchy in 1660 was even less conducive to the continued propagation of revolutionary ideas. Some regicides were executed. John Milton was lucky to escape the same fate. Henry Marten was imprisoned for the rest of his life. Only John Wildman continued to plot and prosper under the new king. And as the revolution suffered reverses, censorship returned. The radical literature from which we know so much about the Levellers was even more dangerous to print and distribute after 1660.

But was all this enough to snuff out the radical impulse of the revolution? Historians of very different persuasions have argued that it was. Blair Worden argues that ‘Over the first eight

decades or so of the eighteenth century the Levellers almost vanished from public discussion'.¹ In the 19th century the Levellers fared little better and, according to Worden, as 'a subject of historical scholarship the Levellers are a twentieth century discovery'.² In an article written early in his career Christopher Hill made a similar point: 'For two centuries nothing was written on the events of 1640-60 that could improve on the comments of contemporary observers...For a century and a half after the Restoration it was Clarendon's view of the great rebellion that prevailed'.³

Other historians have contested this view. A different approach to judging the ways in which the Leveller experience was sustained from the Restoration to the Exclusion Crisis is suggested by Tim Harris.⁴ Harris reviews some of the ways in which Leveller ideas survived into the Restoration. But he also recalibrates the issue in an important way. He suggests that what was fundamentally novel about the Levellers was that they were 'a mass movement, perhaps the first of its kind in England to be organised on such a scale...'.⁵ If we look at the period after the counter-revolution, Harris says, we can see the recurrence of some of these forms of action even where explicitly Leveller demands are not present.⁶ This pushes the argument a little far since the mobilisations of the Exclusion crisis never had the revolutionary force of the Leveller mobilisations. But Harris is right to insist that the Levellers introduced into political life new methods of popular organisation and mobilisation as well as a new set of ideas. These methods were then available to others, whether they were as radical as or less radical than the Levellers. This 'tradition of organising' is as much part of the Leveller inheritance as the *Agreement of the People*.⁷

¹ B Worden, 'The Levellers in history and memory, c.1660-1960' in M Mendle (ed.), *The Putney Debates of 1647, the army the levellers and the English state* (Cambridge, CUP, 2001) p. 267. The same argument is put in B Worden, *Roundhead Reputations* (London, Penguin, 2001) Ch. 12, 'The Levellers and the Left'.

² B Worden, 'The Levellers in history and memory, c.1660-1960', p. 256.

³ C Hill, 'The English Civil War Interpreted by Marx and Engels', in *Science and Society* XII, (1948), pp. 130-131.

⁴ T Harris, 'The Leveller Legacy: from Restoration to the Exclusion Crisis' in M Mendle (ed.), *The Putney Debates of 1647, the army the levellers and the English state*.

⁵ T Harris, 'The Leveller Legacy: from Restoration to the Exclusion Crisis', p. 232.

⁶ T Harris, 'The Leveller Legacy: from Restoration to the Exclusion Crisis', pp. 237-238.

⁷ Which is not to say that the Levellers themselves were not also drawing on earlier forms of oppositional politics.

But Leveller ideas did persist as well. The words from Leveller Richard Rumbold's speech on the scaffold, 'no man...comes into the world with a saddle on his back, neither any booted and spurred to ride him', were reprinted and then paraphrased by novelist Daniel Defoe. Editions of antiquarian Antony Wood's *Athenae Oxonienses, An Exact History of all the Writers and Bishops who have had their education at the most antient and famous University of Oxford* in the late 17th and early 18th centuries contained a lengthy account of Lilburne's life.⁸ In 1710 Henry Hills jr., the son of the original Leveller printer Henry Hills, republished Lilburne's *The Triall of Lieut. Collonell John Lilburne* which his father had originally published in 1649.⁹ In 1724 we have reports of 'enthusiastic Levellers who pulled down enclosures and sought equality'.¹⁰ Ariel Hessayon has noted the 25 page entry on Lilburne in the *Biographia Britannica* and the hostile references to the Levellers by David Hume and Edmund Burke.¹¹

Edward Vallance has uncovered a persistent influence of John Lilburne's politics on radicals in the 1700s. He concludes 'historians have undervalued the degree of intellectual sympathy and continuity between the radicalism of the seventeenth century and that of the eighteenth'.¹² For a later period F K Donnelly writes that there has been a 'too ready acceptance of the discontinuity between the Levellers and the democrats of the post-1788 era'.¹³ He points out that 'Original Leveller pamphlets survived for a long time and were available in London in the 1790 to 1825 era'.¹⁴ Jason McElligott has demonstrated the impact of Lilburne's work on London

⁸ A Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses, An Exact History of all the Writers and Bishops who have had their education at the most antient and famous University of Oxford* (London, R Knaplock, D Midwinter and J Tonson, MDCCXXI), Vol. II. The entry for Cuthbert Sydenham, who had himself written against Lilburne and in defence of Haselrigg and Cromwell, contains a lengthy account of Lilburne's life pp. 171-174.

⁹ *A view of part of the many Traiterous, Disloyal and Turn-about Actions of H H Senior* (1684). Wing (CD-Rom) V359. E Vallance, 'Reborn John? The Eighteenth-century Afterlife of John Lilburne', in *History Workshop Journal*, No.74 (Autumn, 2012) p. 15. Hills jr. was also advertising for sale other works by Lilburne.

¹⁰ See G P Gooch, *The History of English Democratic Ideas in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1898) p. 359 n. 5.

¹¹ A Hessayon, 'Fabricating radical traditions', in M Caricchio, G Tarantino, eds., *Cromohs Virtual Seminars. Recent historiographical trends of the British Studies (17th-18th Centuries)*, 2006-2007: 1-6.

http://www.cromohs.unifi.it/seminari/hessayon2_radical.html

¹² E Vallance, 'Reborn John?...', p. 21.

¹³ F K Donnelly, 'Levellerism in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Albion* 20, 2 (Summer 1988) p. 261.

¹⁴ F K Donnelly, 'Levellerism in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Century Britain', p. 262.

Corresponding Society activist William Hone and his fellow radical Jerimiah Joyce.¹⁵ At about the same time John Towill Rutt, the editor of the diary of Cromwellian MP Thomas Burton, included a note of five pages on Lilburne. He knew of Overton and wrote ‘The *Levellers*...have probably been misrepresented and unjustly censured by contemporary historians’, and that they ‘comprised a large body of Englishmen, of the finest sense, purest manners, and most enlightened religion’.¹⁶ Donnelly and R C Richardson both point to the work of Catherine Macaulay, dismissed by Blair Worden as ‘an isolated voice’.¹⁷ Macaulay was a republican who personally owned some 30 Leveller tracts.¹⁸ Donnelly thinks that 18th century radicals knew about the Levellers but made less use of the heritage than they might have done precisely because of the hostility that the term invoked among their opponents, although there is also considerable evidence of a positive reception of the Levellers among supporters of John Wilkes.¹⁹

Certainly, the 19th century provided more fertile ground for Leveller ideas to be recalled. To some degree this is because the experience of the French Revolution now played a larger part in radical ideology. It was through this accumulating experience of revolution that radicals, and their opponents, would look back at the English Revolution. This points to an important conclusion: historiography of the English Revolution should not be seen in a linear and national manner when it is in fact discontinuous and international.

The Levellers and the working class movement

The Levellers’ message was less threatening to those who formed the first working class and socialist currents in the 19th century. A ‘very favorable exposition and defence of Levellerism’,

¹⁵ J McElligott, ‘William Hone (1780-1842), Print Culture and the Nature of Radicalism’ in A Hessayon and D Finnegan (eds.), *Varieties of Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century Radicalism in Context* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2011) pp. 241-261.

¹⁶ T Burton, *Diary of Thomas Burton, Esq. Member in the Parliaments of Richard and Oliver Cromwell, From 1656 to 1659*, edited by John Towill Rutt (London, Henry Colburn, 1828) in four volumes. See Vol. I, pp. 49-50. Vol. III, pp. 503-508.

¹⁷ R C Richardson, *The Debate on the English Revolution* (London, Methuen, 1977) pp48-49. B Worden, ‘The Levellers in history and memory, c.1660-1960’, p. 270.

¹⁸ F K Donnelly, ‘Levellerism in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Century Britain’, p. 262. Macaulay published her eight volume *History of England from James I to the Brunswick Line* between 1763 and 1783.

¹⁹ E Vallance, ‘Reborn John?...’, pp. 16-17.

originally published in 1659, was reprinted in the Harleian Miscellany in 1810, made available to a wider audience in a collection of tracts published in 1840, and then carried in a Chartist newspaper'.²⁰ Indeed, some Chartists began to call for a rejection of the abusive use of 'Leveller': 'In 1842 two Chartist editors called for a revisionist, democratic approach to the understanding of the Levellers'. Chartist Henry Vincent's introduction to his reprint of the defence of the Levellers from 1659 began with this assessment: 'Hireling historians have conspired in representing the "Levellers" as a set of ignorant fanatics; but the following will evidence the atrocious villainy and utter falsehood of such an assumption'.²¹ Marx and Engels, closely involved with the Chartist leaders, were not inhibited in their discussion of the English Revolution. In 1844 Engels was already comparing the French and English revolutions in these terms:

The English revolution of the seventeenth century is nothing other than the prototype of the French revolution of 1789... Cromwell is Robespierre and Napoleon in one; the Presbyterians, Independents and Levellers appear as the Gironde, the Mountain and the Herbertists and Babouvists; in both cases the political results are rather lamentable and the whole parallel, which could have been drawn in still more precise terms, demonstrates at the same time that religious and irreligious revolutions, in as far as they remain political, finally amount to one and the *same thing*.²²

A few years later Karl Marx was polemicising in his 'A Review of Guizot's Book, *Why Has The English Revolution Been Successful?*' against a gradualist interpretation of the 17th century.²³ Blair Worden tends to talk as if socialists only became interested in the radical wing of the English revolution at the start of the 20th century. But Marx, Engels and other Chartists were showing interest just as socialism emerged as a distinct current. With the retreat of these movements after 1848 the current was much diminished but re-emerged with the rise of the New Unions in

²⁰ F K Donnelly, 'Levellerism in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Century Britain', p264.

²¹ F K Donnelly, 'Levellerism in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Century Britain', pp. 268-269. The use of the term 'hireling' may be an echo of the Quaker use of the same term to describe priests.

²² F Engels, 'The Position of England, The Eighteenth Century' in K Marx and F Engels, *Articles on Britain* (Moscow, Progress, 1975) pp. 13-14.

²³ K Marx, 'A Review of Guizot's Book, "Why Has The English Revolution Been Successful?"' in K Marx and F Engels, *Articles on Britain*, pp. 88-95.

Britain and the Second International in late 1880s. Marx and Engels are one important element of continuity throughout this period. In *Socialism Utopian and Scientific* Engels argued, ‘in every great bourgeois movement there were independent outbursts of that class which was the more or less developed forerunner of the modern proletariat. For example...in the great English Revolution, the Levellers.’²⁴ Earlier Marx wrote: ‘The first manifestation of a truly active communist party is contained within the bourgeois revolutions, at the moment when constitutional monarchy is eliminated. The most consistent *republicans*~in England the *Levellers*, in France the *Babeuf*, *Buonarotti*, etc~were the first to proclaim these “social questions”.’²⁵ Marx and Engels were careful not to overstate this issue, noting that the radical forces ‘had no interests separate from the bourgeoisie’ and that they did not ‘form independent evolved classes or sub-classes’.²⁶

In 1895 German socialist Eduard Bernstein, in exile in London and a close collaborator of Engels, published *Communist and Social-Democratic Currents in the English Revolution* (*Kommunistische und demokratisch-sozialistische Strömungen während der englischen Revolution*). This book was part of a historical series initiated by Karl Kautsky under the title *Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus* (*Forerunners of Modern Socialism*). Bernstein accomplished this work some years before he developed the ‘revisionist’ interpretation of Marxism for which he is still best known.²⁷ The fourth edition was published in 1922 and it was this version that was eventually translated into English and published in 1930 with the far less accurate title of *Cromwell and Communism*.²⁸

Blair Worden suggests that the Chartists were at least as much enamoured with Cromwell as they were with the Levellers. He quotes George Harney’s *Red Republican* describing the ‘spirit of

²⁴ F Engels, *Socialism Utopian and Scientific* (London, Bookmarks, 1993) p. 59. Engels interest in revolts against the feudal order was long-standing, see his *The Peasant War in Germany* (Moscow, Progress, 1977).

²⁵ K Marx, ‘Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality’ in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *MECW*, Vol. 6, (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1976) p. 321. Also see C Hill, ‘The English Civil War Interpreted by Marx and Engels’, p. 144.

²⁶ See C Hill, ‘The English Civil War Interpreted by Marx and Engels’, p145.

²⁷ See D W Morgan, ‘The Father of Revisionism Revisited’, *Journal of Modern History*, 51 (1979) pp. 525-532.

²⁸ E Bernstein, *Cromwell and Communism* (Nottingham, Spokesman, 1980). See Ted Crawford’s notes to the online edition at <http://www.marx.org/reference/archive/bernstein/works/1895/cromwell/trans.htm>

Cromwellian might...stirring at this hour'.²⁹ And he could have added Marx's report of a London mass meeting in 1855 where MP Apsley Pellant tried to flatter a working class audience with a call to 'go about the tasks of reforming the government with determination, temperance, steadiness and the resolution of *Cromwell Ironsides*'.³⁰ There can be no doubt that a cult of Cromwell was under construction in the Victorian era. Thomas Carlyle brought out his *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* in 1845. In it he said Lilburne was the captain of 'a whole submarine world of Calvinistic Sansculottism, Five-point Charter and Rights of Man, threatening to emerge almost two centuries before its time!'.³¹ T W Mason records Chartist Henry Vincent lectured 'repeatedly over three decades on the exemplary moral virtues of Oliver Cromwell'.³² Cromwell's statue at the Palace of Westminster was presented to Parliament by the then Prime Minister, Lord Rosebery, in 1895.³³

There seems no need to counterpose renewed interest in Cromwell to continued interest in the Levellers. After all, Cromwell and the Levellers were, most of the time until 1649, allied on the radical wing of the revolution. *The Red Republican* might as well have been referring to the Cromwell who 'would as soon discharge my pistol' on the King 'as upon any private man' as it was likely to have been referring to Cromwell's suppression of the Levellers. Vincent, as we have seen, praised both. Liberals and the left looked to Cromwell, albeit for different reasons.³⁴

²⁹ B Worden, 'The Levellers in history and memory, c.1660-1960', p274.

³⁰ Quoted by K Marx, 'A Meeting' in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Articles on Britain*, p. 228.

³¹ See A. Hessayon, 'Fabricating radical traditions'.

³² T W Mason, 'Nineteenth-Century Cromwell', *Past and Present*, No. 40 (July 1968) p. 187.

³³ See www.parliament.uk/about/visiting/exhibitions/cromwell_conservation.cfm

³⁴ Leon Trotsky was still presenting a radical Cromwell in his 1925 remarks on the English Revolution in 'Where is Britain Going?' See L Trotsky, *Trotsky's Writings on Britain*, Vol.2 (London, New Park, 1974) pp. 85-93. Worden may be predisposed to see a greater tension here than there actually is because he is reading back his own political preoccupations into the 19th century, perhaps even into the 17th century. He concludes his contribution to M Mendle (ed.), *The Putney Debates of 1647* (Cambridge, CUP, 2001) with this remark: 'perhaps it is fitting that the 350th anniversary of the Putney debates was celebrated in two places: in Putney Church, with speeches by Christopher Hill and Tony Benn, representatives of the tradition that has looked east to Moscow; and, in the conference from which this book has emerged, in Washington, the capital of the free world.' Leaving aside the issue of what might be meant by 'the free world' and whether or not Washington is its capital there is another problem with this formulation. There were some on the left of the Labour Party who were sympathetic to Stalinism, but Tony Benn was not among them. And Christopher Hill famously and acrimoniously left the Communist Party precisely over its crushing of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the related question of its own internal democracy. In doing so he contributed to the founding of the New Left which was highly critical of Stalinism. It seems odd that historians who would balk at failing to distinguish between a Particular Baptist and a General

The shock of the new

What is true, is that for the whole of the 18th century and most of the 19th century documents vital to understanding the Leveller legacy were either completely unknown or known mostly to scholars, booksellers and collectors. And, before the rise of the modern academic system, what was known generally about the English Revolution was transmitted through politically engaged writers who were liable to have an instrumental view of the knowledge they were popularising.

Two historians transformed this landscape: S R Gardiner (1829-1902) and C H Firth (1857-1936). Samuel Rawson Gardiner was a descendent of Oliver Cromwell's through his eldest daughter Bridget and her husband Henry Ireton. He was from a liberal non-conformist background. Gardiner's monumental study of the English Revolution is, unlike any other work over 130 years old, still indispensable to modern historians.³⁵ Gardiner's approach was rigorously empirical and insistently chronological. Although Gardiner had a difficult relationship with academic institutions in his day~he did not have paying University post until comparatively late in his career~his work set a new standard in scholarship. The notion of the Puritan Revolution at the heart of Gardiner's account remained the orthodoxy until the 1930s.³⁶

Charles Firth discovered and prepared for publication the manuscripts left behind by the secretary to the General Council of the New Model Army, William Clarke. This extraordinary record of the New Model Army debates, including the then unknown Putney Debates, transformed the historical record of the revolution at its decisive point. Firth, a friend and colleague of Gardiner, let him see the material as it was being prepared for publication and Gardiner incorporated it into his *History*. As Gardiner recorded in his Preface 'Mr Firth's discovery of the *Clarke Papers* throws every other accession of material into the shade'.³⁷ The

Baptist should be unable to bring the same care to the study of modern left politics. See B Worden, 'The Levellers in history and memory, c.1660-1960', p. 280.

³⁵ As Nicholas Tyacke says in his editor's introduction to *The English Revolution c.1590-1720, Politics, Religion and Communities* (Manchester, MUP, 2007), Gardiner's unrivalled command of sources produced an immensely detailed narrative that has 'broadly stood the test of time'. p. 7.

³⁶ The most recent publication of eight of the 18 volumes of Gardiner's history was made by the Windrush Press between 1987 and 1989. The first four volumes are S R Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War* and remaining four are S R Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate*.

³⁷ S R Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War*, Vol.I (London, Windrush, 1987) p. ix.

Camden Society published the first volume of the *Clarke Papers* in 1891. They still have the capacity to astound modern historians. When the Camden Society's first two volumes of the *Papers* were reissued over 100 years later Austin Woolrych's preface noted: 'one may wonder whether there has ever in modern times been a more exciting archival discovery in any field of British history. Its fascination has spread far beyond the ranks of professional historians; surely no other seventeenth century source is more widely read...'.³⁸

Gardiner and Firth's work suddenly provided a version of the English Revolution's broad historical meaning dramatised with the voices of the revolutionaries themselves. The central role of army radicals and the Levellers, the full scale of the transformation of English society that they debated, was now known in a way in which it had not been before. Eduard Bernstein, who had a very different outlook, quoted Gardiner and Firth as authorities and spoke of Gardiner's 'outstanding work'.³⁹ Quaker and radical Lewis H Berens made good use of the *Clarke Papers* in his 1906 study.⁴⁰ Theodore Pease was, after Bernstein, the next to produce a book length study devoted to the Levellers. His *The Leveller Movement* was based on research of the Thomason Tracts in the British Museum in 1911, although the book was not published until 1916. He benefitted from the fact that the *Catalogue of the Thomason Tracts* had been printed in 1908. Pease said that Gardiner's volumes 'of course have the claim to prior mention'.⁴¹

This first wave of modern scholars on the radicals of the English Revolution came from politically heterogeneous backgrounds. Bernstein stood, at this point, in the dead centre of the Marxist orthodoxy of the Second International. His work is valuable because it is the first book length study of the Levellers and Diggers that situates their struggle in the wider social and economic conflicts of their day. It also understands them as active revolutionaries, people

³⁸ A Woolrych, 'Preface to the 1992 Edition' in W Clarke, *The Clarke Papers* (edited and introduced by C H Firth, London, Royal Historical Society, 1992). There is no pagination for the Woolrych's Preface but these remarks are on the first page.

³⁹ E Bernstein, *Cromwell and Communism*, (Nottingham, Spokesman, 1980) p. 11. The remarks are made in an introduction to editions later than the original 1895 publication. There is, however, no specific date on for the introduction itself.

⁴⁰ L H Berens, *The Digger Movement in the Days of the Commonwealth* (Monmouth, Merlin, 2007).

⁴¹ T C Pease, *The Leveller Movement* (Gloucester, Mass., Peter Smith, 1965) p. 367.

whose foremost affiliation was to an organised group of militants attempting a rudimentary collective political challenge to the existing order.

Lewis Berens' analysis bears the marks of two traditions. The first, and the one that has the greatest impact on the substantive core of his book, is his religious affiliation as a Quaker. The second and lesser influence, although it is declared loudly in the conclusion of the book, is his admiration for American radical Henry George (1839-1897). George, influential in his day, regarded the land as the common inheritance of humanity. A socialist in only the broadest sense, George was described by Marx as a 'writer with talent' but whose economic theories were 'utterly backward'.⁴² In the fundamentals of their approaches, Berens and Bernstein had little in common, although both did see long-term causes of the English Revolution running back to the Reformation.

The History of English Democratic Ideas in the Seventeenth Century, published in 1898, came from the pen of George Peabody Gooch. Later, in 1906, Gooch was elected Liberal MP for Bath and, in the 1930s, president of the National Peace Council. His book was read before publication by Gardiner and made full use of the *Clarke Papers*. Although it is devoted to the idea of democratic progress culminating in Victorian parliamentarianism, it also concludes by arguing that as the founder of modern socialism, Robert Owen, was 'directly descended from the thinkers of the Interregnum'.⁴³ And as Felix Hirsch remarks, 'His treatment of the Communists of those days, especially Winstanley, was so novel that this chapter was translated into Russian, after the Bolsheviks came to power. That meant, on their part, quite a compliment to such a liberal bourgeois as Gooch'.⁴⁴

Theodore Pease was an American academic. His *The Leveller Movement* concentrates more centrally on the Leveller movement than Bernstein or Gooch. Pease is careful to cite the political context of the movement but there is a strong accent on the Levellers as the creators

⁴² K Marx, 'Marx to Friedrich Adolph Sorge in Hoboken' in K Marx and F Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow, Progress, 1955) pp. 322-323. See also the discussion of Berens and George in J Gurney, *Gerrard Winstanley* (London, Pluto, 2013) p. 116.

⁴³ G P Gooch, *The History of English Democratic Ideas in the Seventeenth Century*, p. vi and p. 360.

⁴⁴ F E Hirsch, 'George Peabody Gooch', *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Sep., 1954), p. 263. See also F Eyck, 'Gooch, George Peabody (1873-1968)', *ODNB*.

of a written constitution. Pease stands at the heart of the American liberal tradition, more Whig than the British original:

...the Levellers developed a body of constitutional and political doctrines that suggest the main theories of American constitutional law. The sovereignty of the people, the inalienable right of the individual, the binding force of paramount law, the enforcement of political law by judicial action~all of these are American doctrines.⁴⁵

Thus in this first wave of modern scholarship three of the four main currents of later analysis are represented: the left's social and economic framework, the religious dimension and liberal political theory. What is not yet present is a modern academic current which attempts to diminish the Levellers' influence on the revolution. At this time none of the writers specifically about the Levellers and Diggers are English: Bernstein is German, Berens and Pease are American. Even the journalist and admirer of Winstanley, John Morrison Davidson, was Scottish.⁴⁶ This suggests that where some look for the continuity of Leveller and radical influence only in England we would be wise to widen the search.

In its origins and early years the English Revolution was connected to America, just as American scholars were later vital to recording its history. America and the West Indies were important to the radicals before the revolution as sanctuary from Stuart persecution. John Winthrop, the first Governor of Massachusetts, was married to Martha Rainsborough, sister of Leveller Thomas Rainsborough. It was from the other side of the Atlantic that many returned to fight in the New Model Army. Winthrop's son, Stephen, was a captain in the regiment of William Rainsborough, Leveller and brother of Thomas. William himself came back from America to fight in the civil war.⁴⁷ Stephen Winthrop, like his father, married a Rainsborough sister. It was to America and the West Indies that many went in the 1650s and after the Restoration. Both William Rainsboroughs, Thomas's brother and son, went to Boston after the revolution. Henry Marten's brother George was in Barbados in 1647 and in *Oroonoko* Aphra

⁴⁵ T C Pease, *The Leveller Movement*, p. 363.

⁴⁶ H C G Matthew, 'John Davidson', *ODNB*. J Gurney, *Gerrard Winstanley* (London, Pluto, 2013) p. 5, 116.

⁴⁷ C G Pestana, 'Rainborowe, William (fl. 1639-1673)', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004).

Behn, despite her royalism, praised him as ‘a man of great gallantry, wit and goodness...wise and eloquent’.⁴⁸ Regicides William Goffe and Edward Whalley fled to New England where they were welcomed as heroes and protected from capture by the colonists.⁴⁹

The Puritan and radical current fed into the American Revolution. As one account of the revolution records, ‘Country folk...said little before 1774. But farm families christened newborn boys Oliver, after Cromwell, showing what they were thinking’.⁵⁰ One such personal connection can be traced through the family of Thomas Jefferson himself:

Jefferson’s maternal grandfather was Isham Randolph and in 1717 at Shadwell Parish Church in London he married Jane Lilburne, a first-cousin descendant of Freeborn John. Isham and Jane had two daughters: one married Peter Jefferson (father of Thomas) who named his Virginia family home Shadwell... The second daughter of Isham and Jane married Charles Lewis who named a son Charles Lilburne Lewis. That son married Lucy Jefferson, sister of Thomas and they named a son Lilburne Lewis. Randolph Jefferson (brother of Thomas and Lucy) named a son Lilburne Jefferson. In 1790 Thomas Jefferson’s daughter Martha (Patsy) married her second cousin Thomas Mann Randolph and they established their Virginia home at Edgehill. The house was named after the site of the first major battle in the English Civil Wars...⁵¹

In 1826 Jefferson quoted the Leveller epigram from Richard Rumbold’s scaffold speech.⁵²

⁴⁸ See C Hill, ‘Radical Pirates’, pp165-175. H R Williamson, *Four Stuart Portraits* (London, Evans Brothers, 1949) p. 110. Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko and other stories* (Köln, Konemann, 1999) p. 73. George Marten was in Suriname after his time in Barbados. Behn visited the English sugar colony in Suriname while in her twenties. Behn’s play *The Younger Brother* has George Marten as a central character.

⁴⁹ See C Durston, ‘Goffe, William (d. 1679?)’, ODNB (Oxford, 2004) and C Durston, ‘Whalley, Edward, appointed Lord Whalley under the protectorate (d. 1674/5)’, ODNB. Also E Stiles, *A History of Three Judges of Charles I* (Hartford, Conn., 1794). Others, like Edmund Ludlow, fled to Europe. See C. H. Firth, ‘Ludlow, Edmund (1616/17–1692)’, and B Worden, ODNB entry.

⁵⁰ B Levine, S Brier, D Brundage, E Countryman, D Fennell, M Ridiker, *Who Built America? Working People and the Nation’s Economy, Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. I, (New York, Pantheon, 1989) p. 149.

⁵¹ See <http://www.johnlilburne.com/reference/johnlilburne.html>

⁵² See C Hill, *The Experience of Defeat, Milton and Some Contemporaries* (London, Faber, 1984) p. 37.

The second explosion of Leveller print

The single greatest wave of publication of Leveller writings since the Levellers themselves burst into print in the 1640s took place from the late 1930s through to the end of the 1940s. It is not difficult to trace the social conditions which influenced this revival. The impulse of the Russian Revolution led to the establishment of mass Communist Parties in Europe. Even the relatively small British CP was many times bigger, and more effective than any of the socialist groupings that existed before the First World War.⁵³ But the inter-war era was also the time when the Labour Party really became established as the dominant organisation in the British working class.

The slump and the threat of fascism in the 1930s strengthened the counter-current of radicalism in British society, even if it failed to influence the course adopted by the governing elite. The fragility of European parliamentary democracy in the face of fascism, the collapse of appeasement in Britain, the experience of war, all led to the re-ignition of a profound egalitarian impulse among wide swathes of British people and to a questioning of what democracy would deliver in the post-war world.⁵⁴ In the US the slump of the 1930s was more severe than in Britain and the period of the New Deal had popularised egalitarian notions in a way that had not been the case since the Civil War and would not be true again until the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.⁵⁵

From and into this environment a mass of publications about the Levellers flowed. In 1938 A S P Wodehouse published a selection of texts from the *Clarke Papers*, including the Putney Debates, under the title *Puritanism and Liberty* (1938). Published in the same year, A L Morton's *A People's History of England* contained a chapter on the Levellers. On the eve of war Henry Holorenschaw produced *The Levellers and the English Revolution* (1939) as part of The New People's

⁵³ See R Challinor, *The Origins of British Bolshevism* (London, Croom Helm, 1977).

⁵⁴ On the background to this period see for instance E Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes* (London, Michael Joseph, 1994) Chs. 1-7. J Stevenson and C Cook, *The Slump, Society and Politics during the Depression* (London, Quartet, 1977). N Branson and M Heinemann, *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties* (St. Albans, Panther, 1973).

⁵⁵ See, for instance, H Brogan, *Longman History of the United States of America* (London, Longman, 1985), H Zinn, *A Peoples History of the United States* (London, Longman, 1980) esp. Chs. 15 and 16, and E Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, esp., Ch. 5.

Library series published, like Morton's *People's History*, by CP publisher Victor Gollancz.⁵⁶

Gollancz's was busy again in 1940 publishing David Petegorsky's study of the Diggers, *Left Wing Democracy in the English Civil War*, as a Left Book Club edition. Originally a doctoral dissertation at the University of London, the subject of the book was first suggested to Petegorsky by Harold Laski, co-founder of the Left Book Club and, after the war, Chairman of the Labour Party.⁵⁷ One only has to recall the situation in which Petegorsky wrote his preface in May 1940~France lost, the Dunkirk evacuation, the Home Guard training to repel a German invasion~to understand the full meaning of the title of Petegorsky's book.⁵⁸ George Orwell's introduction to his 1948 co-edited collection of *British Pamphleteers*, which included Leveller tracts, is very much of this moment.⁵⁹

Two crucial selections of Leveller pamphlets came out of the US at the same time in 1944. It is testimony to the amount of unpublished Leveller material that lay in the archives that Don Wolfe's *Leveller Manifestos of the Puritan Revolution* and William Haller and Godfrey Davies' *The Leveller Tracts 1647-1653* reproduced a total of 35 pamphlets only four of which were duplicates. M A Gibb did the work for the first book-length biography of Lilburne, *John Lilburne The Leveller*, before the war but it only appeared in 1947. And in the same year *John Wildman, Plotter and Postmaster*, Maurice Ashley's reconstruction of the life of the Leveller leader was also published.⁶⁰ The following year the torrent was joined by Wilhelm Schenk's *The Concern for Social*

⁵⁶ Henry Holorenschaw was a pen name of Joseph Needham, scientist, China expert and Marxist. Joseph Needham helpfully supplied a forward for 'my friend' Henry Holorenschaw's book on the Levellers.

⁵⁷ D Petegorsky, *Left Wing Democracy in the English Civil War* (London, Gollancz, 1940), Preface. Laski had already edited the 1927 reprint of Gooch's *The History of English Democratic Ideas in the Seventeenth Century*.

⁵⁸ Tom Wintringham, founder of the *Daily Worker* and *Left Review*, veteran of the Spanish Civil War, left the CP in 1938 when his wife was accused of being a Trotskyist spy. He formed the first Home Guard units and trained them in tactics learnt in Spain, although the government would never let him into the official Home Guard when it was formed because of his left-wing politics. His book *Mutiny. Mutinies from Spartacus to Invergordon* (London, Stanley Nott, 1936) contained a chapter on the Levellers. In 1948 George Orwell, also a veteran of Spain, edited with Reginald Reynolds the volume *British Pamphleteers, Vol.1, From the Sixteenth Century to the French Revolution*. In his introduction Orwell wrote: "The English Diggers and Levellers . . . are links in a chain of thought which stretches from the slave revolts of antiquity, through various peasant risings and heretical sects of the Middle Ages, down to the Socialists of the nineteenth century and the Trotskyists and Anarchists of our own day." This was, of course, a calculated insult to the Communist Party. See P Bounds, 'Orwell and Englishness: The Dialogue with British Marxism', *Cultural Logic, An Electronic Journal of Marxist Theory and Practice* (2007) at <http://clogic.eserver.org>

⁵⁹ G Orwell and R Reynolds (eds.), *British Pamphleteers, Vol. I, From the sixteenth century to the French Revolution* (London, Allan Wingate, 1948).

⁶⁰ M Ashley, *John Wildman, Plotter and Postmaster, A study of the English Republican Movement in the Seventeenth Century* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1947).

Justice in the Puritan Revolution.⁶¹ In 1949 Hugh Ross Williamson provided the first 20th century study of the life of Thomas Rainsborough as one of his *Four Stuart Portraits*.⁶² Christopher Hill's much reproduced pamphlet 'The English Revolution 1640' originally appeared for the anniversary of the revolution in 1940 in a short book with the subtitle 'Three Essays of Interpretation'. The other two contributions were Margaret James' 'Contemporary Materialist Interpretations of Society in the English Revolution', which cited the Levellers and Winstanley, and Edgell Rickword's 'Milton: the Revolutionary Intellectual'.⁶³ In 1949 Christopher Hill and future Labour government minister Edmund Dell edited a collection of source material, *The Good Old Cause*, which contained a separate chapter of Leveller material.⁶⁴ The Communist Party Historians Group was formed in 1946. It grew out of a conference called to discuss Morton's *A People's History*. In 1952 this group were largely responsible for the launch of the journal *Past and Present*.⁶⁵

Slightly outside this period, but very much a product of the scholarship and publications that it produced, is Joseph Frank's, *The Levellers, A History of the Writings of Three Seventeenth Century Social Democrats John Lilburne, Richard Overton, William Walwyn* (1955). Nearly everything about this title, apart from the words 'the Levellers', is misleading. Frank does not argue that Lilburne, Overton and Walwyn are 'social democrats' in either the 19th century meaning (i.e. Marxist revolutionaries) or in the 20th century meaning (i.e. Labour Party type reformists) of this phrase. Neither is Frank's history a serial account of the writings of Lilburne, Overton and Walwyn. This could be more accurately said of Pease's book which does trace the evolution of Leveller political thought through their writings. Precisely the strength of Frank's book is that it is the

⁶¹ W Schenk, *The Concern for Social Justice in the Puritan Revolution* (London, Longmans, 1948).

⁶² Only predated by E Peacock, 'Notes on the Life of Thomas Rainsborough', *Archaeologia*, 46 (1880).

⁶³ C Hill, M James, E Rickword, *Three Essays in Interpretation, The English Revolution 1640* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1940).

⁶⁴ C Hill and E Dell (eds.), *The Good Old Cause, The English Revolution of 1640-1660, Its Causes, Courses and Consequences* (London, Frank Cass, 1949).

⁶⁵ For accounts of the CP Historians Group see H Kaye, *The British Marxist Historians* (Cambridge, Polity, 1995), S Ashman, 'The Communist Party Historians Group' in J Rees (ed.), *Essays on Historical Materialism* (London, Bookmarks, 1998) and D Parker (ed.), *Ideology, Absolutism and the English Revolution, debates of the British Communist Historians* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 2008) R Samuel, 'British Marxist Historians, 1880-1980: Part One', *New Left Review*, 120 (1980), and E Hobsbawm, 'The Historians' Group of the Communist Party', in M Cornforth (ed.), *Rebels and their Causes. Essays in Honour of A.L. Morton* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1978), pp. 21-47.

first major study to deal with the Levellers as an organised political movement. Leveller writings are placed in the context of a dynamic political situation in which the variations between texts were as likely to be a result of the pressures from opposed political currents and temporary allies as they were to be evolved constitutional thoughts. It is in this way that Frank profited from and incorporated the social and political work that had been done on the Leveller movement in the preceding decades. Neither are these strengths vitiated by Frank's evident concern with the McCarthy Trials taking place in the US at the time he wrote and to which he alludes. Frank does not make this the organising principle of his book. Indeed he refers to this context sparingly.

What were the main characteristics of this enormous outpouring of material about the Levellers? Firstly, the main traditions identified from the late 19th century are all still present~Christian (often non-conformist), liberal and left, including Marxist. Margaret Gibb's biography of Lilburne carried the subtitle 'A Christian Democrat' and of all the work published in this period it has the greatest concern with the religious dimension of Leveller thought. Godfrey Davies, co-editor of *The Leveller Tracts 1647-1653*, had worked with C H Firth and can legitimately be seen as working within Gardiner's 'great tradition'. T C Pease's review of Haller and Davies certainly welcomed this edition, and D M Wolfe's compilation, as an extension of his own 1916 liberal interpretation of the Levellers.⁶⁶ Joseph Frank's book, the most impressive account of the Levellers to have emerged up to this point, stood in the mainstream of the liberal democratic tradition. Morton, Holorenschaw (the pen name of Joseph Needham), Hill, Petegorsky, and Dell were all from the Communist Party, the left of the Labour Party, or held views compatible with these political positions.⁶⁷ Many of these writers shared a non-conformist background, like Berens, Hill, Brailsford and E P Thompson. Others, like Tawney, were Christian Socialists. Petegorsky, like Marx himself, came from a Jewish background.

But, secondly, whatever the ideological inclinations of the authors, they all drew from their environment a deep concern with the fate of democracy. Margaret Gibb's introduction to *John*

⁶⁶ T C Pease, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (Jan., 1945), pp. 315-316

⁶⁷ Hill's views were certainly influenced by his study in Moscow of Soviet historians' treatments of the English Revolution, although he was far from uncritical of them. See C Hill, 'Soviet Interpretations of the English Interregnum', *Economic History Review*, No.8 (1938) pp. 159-167.

Lilburne, her attention to the religious dimension of Lilburne's thought notwithstanding, is permeated with the concern that 'modern liberal democracy...today stands under judgement' because it has produced a 'Monopoly Capitalism' that results in the 'exploitation of human need for the self-aggrandisement of the great combines'. It was this which meant that 'today...it is particularly apposite to look back at that moment when it first emerged as a potential system of government, in the Leveller Movement'.⁶⁸ Whatever the exact political viewpoint of the main authors, the general spectrum of opinion had moved left in the 1930s and 1940s.

Thirdly, the weight of the left, particularly the Marxist left, was greater than it had been in the past. But it still did not predominate. And the presence of Marxist and left analyses was more marked in relation to the Levellers and the radicals of the English Revolution than it was in relation to the analysis of the Revolution as a whole. Variants of the Whig or liberal interpretation of the English Revolution were still dominant. Christopher Hill recalls: 'When I started out as a historian the orthodoxy was that England was the centre of world history and that the whole of history was working towards the evolution of democracy of which England was the perfect example. That's the thing my generation were gunning for~Anglo-centrism and concentration almost exclusively on political and constitutional history'.⁶⁹

There were of course debates and arguments both between and within these broad currents of opinion. Winthrop Hudson, reviewing the Haller and Davies and the Wolfe collections in *Church History*, posted two objections to the editors' views of the Levellers. Firstly, 'The editors of both volumes make much of the fact that the Leveller movement was secular and not religious in character. They speak of the "secular philosophy" of the leaders and of the "secular Reformation" the Levellers were seeking to achieve. It is rather difficult to discover the basis for this characterization, for Lilburne's agitators were religious men, "animated by religious convictions".' And a 'second minor misinterpretation to be found in both introductions is the conception that Winstanley and the Diggers embarked on a program of economic reform and

⁶⁸ M A Gibb, *John Lilburne The Leveller, A Christian Democrat* (London, Lindsay Drummond, 1947) pp12-14.

⁶⁹ Christopher Hill in L Humber and J Rees, 'The Good Old Cause~an interview with Christopher Hill', *International Socialism* 56 (London, 1992) p126.

summoned men to reconstruct society after a communist pattern. Winstanley was an apocalypticist'.⁷⁰ And while Hudson was critical of those he felt underplayed the religious dimension of Leveller and Digger thought, Christopher Hill pointed out that Henry Holorenschaw was 'exaggerating "socialist" tendencies among the Levellers'.⁷¹

C L R James' enthusiastic welcome for the publication of Leveller manifestoes went onto make an important and little remarked upon point about the Marxist attitude to the radicals of the English Revolution. James argued that interest in the Levellers had been pioneered by liberal historians whereas those historians associated with the official Communist Parties had been more interested in the Diggers. The record of publication bears this out. Of the three major histories of the Levellers, two, Pease and Frank, were written by liberals and the third author, Brailsford, discussed below, was an anti-Stalinist Labour left. Hill had left the CP by the time he edited Brailsford's book for publication in 1961. James traced this fact back to the bureaucratisation of the communist movement under Stalin and its lack of sympathy for active revolutionary movements in comparison with 'communist' utopias.⁷²

This was an era of enormous creativity and it laid the basis for much scholarship down to the present day~whether subsequent historians agreed or not with the account being developed by Marxists, the left, and liberal historians. Leaving aside the broader work on the nature of the English Revolution, what we know specifically about the Levellers and other radicals is from work that built directly on the foundations laid in this period.

⁷⁰ W S Hudson, *Church History*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Jun., 1945), pp. 132-133. See also W Hudson, 'Economic and Social Thought of Gerrard Winstanley: Was he a Seventeenth Century Marxist?' in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 18, No.1, (March 1946) pp. 1-21.

⁷¹ See 'Books for further reading' in C Hill, M James, E Rickword, *Three Essays in Interpretation, The English Revolution 1640*, p135. The same point can be made about the title of Fenner Brockway's *Britain's First Socialists* (London, Quartet, 1980).

⁷² C L R James (writing as G.F. Eckstein), 'Ancestors of the Proletariat' in *Fourth International*, Vol. 10 No. 8, September 1949, pp.252-255 (available at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1949/09/english-revolution.htm>). Also see 'Cromwell and the Levellers', *Fourth International*, Vol. 10, No. 5, May 1949, pp.143-148 (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1949/05/english-revolution.htm>).

In 1961 two crucial works on the Levellers were published~H N Brailsford's *The Levellers and the English Revolution* and Pauline Gregg's biography of Lilburne, *Free-Born John*.⁷³ Brailsford died in 1958 leaving the almost completed manuscript of the *The Levellers* to be prepared for publication by Christopher Hill. Brailsford had led a remarkable life. The son of a Methodist preacher, he was already a well known foreign correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian* in the 1890s. Brailsford was a stalwart of the Independent Labour Party and stood, unsuccessfully, as a Labour candidate in 1918. He visited Russia twice in 1920 and was sympathetic to the Russian Revolution but in the 1930s he was one of the few writers associated with the Left Book Club who was consistently critical of the Stalin show trials. In *The Levellers* Brailsford concentrated the accumulated wealth of knowledge that had formed in the liberal and left currents since Gardiner. Towards Gardiner and Firth, Brailsford said, he felt a 'gratitude that borders on veneration'. He had, he said, 'the good fortune to count' Eduard Bernstein 'as my friend' and he regarded Bernstein as 'the forerunner of us all'.⁷⁴ To his 'old friend' R H Tawney, and to G P Gooch and Margaret James, Brailsford gave thanks for helping him to 'organise my picture of the social background of Cromwell and the Levellers'. But the 'chief of my debts', wrote Brailsford, were to the 'pioneering work in recent years' by Pease, Haller and Davies, Wolfe, Petegorsky, Wodehouse and M A Gibb.⁷⁵

Brailsford's was the first book length account to fully integrate the economic, social and religious background of the Levellers with a description of the political dynamic of the revolution, the Levellers' role as an organised revolutionary current within it and an estimate of the ideological advances that Leveller thought represented. If nothing else it was a considerable work of synthesis. But it was more than this. Throughout the book, but particularly in the chapters on 'The Leveller Party' and 'The Moderate', Brailsford presented more forcefully than any writer before him a picture of the Levellers as a functioning political organisation of a quite new type.

⁷³ H N Brailsford, (Christopher Hill ed.) *The Levellers and the English Revolution* (Nottingham, Spokesman, originally the Cresset Press, 1961). P Gregg, *Free-Born John* (London, Dent, 1961).

⁷⁴ H N Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, p. xiii.

⁷⁵ H N Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, pp. xii-xiii.

Brailsford also had an eye for the telling detail. Just one example will suffice. There is an ongoing debate about whether or not the Leveller name was accepted or rejected by the movement. We know it began life as an insult directed at Lilburne and his comrades by their opponents. And we know that in official pronouncements the Levellers distanced themselves from the name, and certainly from the accusation that they meant to level citizens economically. But Brailsford's study of the *Moderate* caught its account of the inscription on Rainsborough's grave:

Rainsborough the just, the valiant and the true,
Here bids the noble Levellers adieu.⁷⁶

So, by 1648, the *Moderate* and supporters of the Levellers at Rainsborough's funeral, a major occasion for the party, were using the name positively.⁷⁷

Pauline Gregg's life of Lilburne was cast in the same foundry as Brailsford's book. It benefitted from the same accumulation of scholarship and it shared Brailsford's concern to illuminate the social and economic background of the Leveller movement. And again, like Brailsford, Gregg described the Levellers as a political organisation. One way of seeing the distance travelled since M A Gibb's biography is to compare her chapter on Lilburne as 'Leader of the Levellers' with Gregg's chapter 'Party Leader'.⁷⁸ Only in Gregg's account does the issue of political organisation appear as a subject of serious discussion. Gibb is more concerned with the political content of Lilburne's pamphlets at the height of the Leveller movement.

This social interpretation of the English Revolution developed throughout the 1960s and 1970s in the work of Christopher Hill, Brian Manning, A L Morton, Norah Carlin and others.⁷⁹ It is

⁷⁶ H N Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, p310. A valuable related use of the *Moderate* to gauge the views of the Leveller movement is contained in R Howell, Jr. and D E Brewster, 'Reconsidering the Levellers: The Evidence of the Moderate', *Past and Present*, No. 46 (Feb., 1970), pp. 68-86.

⁷⁷ Contrary to Andrew Sharpe's assertion in his introduction to A Sharpe (ed.), *The English Levellers* (Cambridge, CUP, 1998) p. xxii.

⁷⁸ M A Gibb, *John Lilburne*, pp. 160-187. P Gregg, *Freeborn John*, pp. 226-237.

⁷⁹ Christopher Hill's publications during this period include *The Century of Revolution 1603-1714* (Wokingham, Van Nostrand, Reinhold, 1961), *Reformation of Industrial Revolution* (London, Pelican, 1967),

hard to reconcile this record of publication in the 1960s and 1970s with the account in one of the most sustained critiques of Marxist histories of the English Revolution, Alastair MacLachlan's *The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary England*. To speak only of Hill, any period that includes the publication of his *The Century of Revolution 1603-1714, Reformation to Industrial Revolution* and *God's Englishman* cannot be accurately described as merely 'Saving Appearances' in the Marxist account of the revolution.⁸⁰

There were, of course, serious debates between Marxists and non-Marxists and among Marxists during this period. The left analysis was never unchallenged. Howard Shaw's popular 1968 text book, *The Levellers*, for instance, concluded with a compendium of arguments that were later the mainstays of revisionism. Shaw wrote:

In the last analysis, the Levellers failure was due to their inability to stir the lower classes on their own behalf...the vast bulk of the population was socially conservative and politically apathetic...The Civil War itself...had been an internecine struggle among the propertied classes. The ordinary people had on the whole been disinterested spectators...The Levellers did their best to counteract this political illiteracy...In London and the army...they achieved temporary success; elsewhere the Leveller dream was shared by too few and feared by too many.

He concluded with this assessment: 'What, if anything, did the Levellers contribute to posterity? In a sense, very little... "they had", in the words of Dr Schenk, "much more in common with William Langdale than with Thomas Paine or Karl Marx".'⁸¹

Naturally some elements of the left analysis of the 1940s had been significantly altered by the 1970s. One such debate that concerned the Levellers was begun in 1962 by C B Macpherson in

God's Englishman (London, Pelican, 1970), *The World Turned Upside Down* (London, Penguin, 1972). A L Morton's work included, *The World of the Ranters* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1970) and *Freedom in Arms, A Selection of Leveller Writings* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1974). Brian Manning, *The English People and the English Revolution* (London, Heinemann, 1976). Norah Carlin, 'Marxism and the English Civil War', *International Socialism*, No. 10, (London, 1980)

⁸⁰ A MacLachlan, *The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary England* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1996) Ch. 4.

⁸¹ H Shaw, *The Levellers* (London, Longman, 1968) p. 97 and p. 104.

The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism.⁸² MacPherson argued that the Levellers had not supported manhood suffrage in the Putney debates and elsewhere since they wished to exclude servants, alms-takers and wage labourers from the electorate. Hill supported MacPherson.⁸³ Some historians have taken the MacPherson thesis as an admission that Marxists accept a view of the Levellers which diminishes their status as radicals. But this is not the case and the reason why not is illustrative of the Marxist understanding of the English Revolution. For Marxists, and contrary to the stereotype, the revolutionaries of the English Revolution cannot be assimilated into a model developed to explain later working class revolutions. These earlier movements, as Marx and Engels pointed out in the *Communist Manifesto* are ‘movements of minorities, or the interests of minorities’.⁸⁴ They seek to supplant one ruling minority with another. To do so they mobilise wider layers of the population but there is no necessary link between their interests and those of the wider groups to which they appeal. So to find that the Levellers appealed beyond their ranks and beyond the bounds of their own class but not necessarily in universal terms would be a confirmation of this analysis~which was part of MacPherson’s point.

Yet, as a matter of fact, MacPherson, and Hill, were wrong. Macpherson based his analysis on a few phrases of Maximilian Petty’s in the Putney Debates and on only one of the three editions of the *Agreement of the People*. On most occasions and in general the Levellers stuck by a wider view of who should be able to vote. Nevertheless, the reasons for the compromises are interesting. In both cases, at Putney and in the second *Agreement of the People*, the Levellers were interacting with wider political forces which they were trying to get to accept as many of their demands as possible. The compromises were aimed at sustaining the forward momentum of the revolution. To the extent that they did limit the franchise it was because they thought that servants and alms-takers were under the sway of masters and not able to properly exercise their freedom of expression, especially since there were no secret ballots. The Levellers feared the

⁸² C B MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford, OUP, 1962).

⁸³ See, for instance, Hill’s early reaction to MacPherson in H N Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, p. 694.

⁸⁴ K Marx and F Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London, Verso, 1998) p49.

conservative impact that this would have. Although this view is contested it seems that to the extent that the Levellers are less than full democrats, it is only because they were more determined revolutionaries.⁸⁵

Some of the characteristics of this debate~textual analysis at the expense of a wider social history, close study of individual moments at the expense of examining the longer social process, neglect of political dynamics~were signs of things to come.

Revisionism

The revisionist challenge to liberal and left interpretations of the English Revolution synchronised with almost suspicious exactitude with the end of the post-war boom and the abandonment of the welfare state consensus. This change, beginning in the mid-1970s, achieved its electoral representation when Margaret Thatcher became prime minister of Britain in 1979 and Ronald Reagan president of the US in 1980. One of the arguments made against the left by the revisionists was that they read their current political preoccupations back into history. But if that was sometimes true of the left it was also certainly true of some revisionists. You can almost hear the snap of Gordon Gekko's red braces in the background as J C D Clark quotes approvingly a letter to the *Times Educational Supplement*,

British political science was particularly torpid until the electoral shock of 1979. Too many existing political scientists belong to the generation of 1968~a provenance that almost disqualifies them from comment on late 20th century politics.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ For some of the discussion on this issue see A L Morton, 'Leveller Democracy~Fact or Myth?' in *The World of the Ranters*; K Thomas, 'The Levellers and the Franchise' in G E Aylmer, (ed.) *The Interregnum, the Quest for a Settlement* (Basingstoke, MacMillan, 1972) pp. 57-79; R Howell, Jr. and D E Brewster, 'Reconsidering the Levellers: The Evidence of the Moderate'; J C Davis, 'The Levellers and Democracy', *Past and Present*, No. 40 (Jul., 1968) pp. 174-180; C Thompson, 'Maximilian Petty and the Putney Debate on the Franchise', *Past and Present*, No. 88 (Aug., 1980) pp. 63-69; B Taft, 'The Council of Officers' Agreement of the People, 1648/9', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Mar., 1985), pp. 169-185. Also see M Goldsmith, 'Levelling by Sword, Spade and Word: Radical Egalitarianism in the English Revolution' in C Jones, M Newitt, S Roberts (eds.), *Politics and People in Revolutionary England* (Oxford, 1986) pp. 65-80.

⁸⁶ Quoted in J Rees, 'Revolution Denied' in L German and R Hoveman (eds.) *A Socialist Review* (London, Bookmarks, 1998) p120. Gordon Gekko was the fictional corporate raider of Oliver Stone's 1987 film *Wall Street*.

Clark was equally opposed to, in his words, the 'Old Hat' historians of the S R Gardiner school and the 'Old Guard' historians 'formed in the matrix of inter-war Marxism' and the 'Class of 68'.⁸⁷

Revisionism drew on the work of, among others, Conrad Russell, Mark Kishlansky, Kevin Sharpe, John Morrill, and Peter Laslett.⁸⁸ The major themes of revisionism were a stress on the accidental nature of the revolution rather than on its long term social and economic causes; a localist denial of nationally operative causes of the revolution; an insistence that religious issues were more central to the revolution than previous historians had allowed; an attempt to deny that the revolution involved class conflict or that the mass of people had much impact on its outcome; a corresponding emphasis on 'high politics' as a key determinant of events. This is not the place in which all these general issues can be explored but we can examine some of the arguments as they have been applied to the Levellers.⁸⁹ Two issues are of particular interest. One is the religious dimension of Leveller organisation, the second is the impact of the Levellers as a movement.

Murray Tolmie is by no means a stereotypical revisionist but he is a critic of 'whig historians' and of A L Morton and Christopher Hill for neglecting the role of 'respectable nonconformity' and religious sects.⁹⁰ The *Triumph of the Saints* is a powerful act of historical recovery which substantially adds to our knowledge of the religious underground from which some of the Leveller leaders emerged. It shows that the Levellers learned a proto-democratic ideology in the Independent churches and that it gave them a history of oppositional organisation. Tolmie shows that the Levellers continued to rely on the gathered churches for organisational support

⁸⁷ J C D Clark, *Revolution and Rebellion* (Cambridge, CUP, 1986) p. 2.

⁸⁸ C Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford, OUP, 1990); M Kishlansky, 'The Army and the Levellers: the roads to Putney', *Historical Journal* 22 (1979), pp. 795-824, 'Consensus Politics and the Structure of Debate at Putney', *Journal of British Studies* 20 (1981), pp. 50-69, 'What happened at Ware?', *Historical Journal* 25 (1982), pp. 827-39; J Morrill, *The Revolt of the Provinces* (London, Longman, 1976), *The Nature of the English Revolution* (London, Longman, 1993); K Sharpe *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven, Yale, 1996); P Laslett, *The World We Have Lost Further Explored* (London, Methuen, 1983). See also the summary revisionist case in A MacLachlan, *The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary England*.

⁸⁹ I have attempted a brief reply to the revisionists in J Rees, 'Revolution Denied'.

⁹⁰ M Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints, the Separate Churches of London 1616-1649* (Cambridge, CUP, 1977) pp. ix-x.

until the crisis which saw them separate once and for all from their sometime Independent allies in the late 1640s.

But Tolmie's close reading of the development of these relations ends in a question that he fails adequately to answer: if the same religious and church organisation formed both the Levellers and their Independent competitors in the crisis of the late 1640s, what was it that caused the division? Similar formation led to divergent conclusions. Why? It is here that social and political factors must supplement purely religious explanations. Certainly the Independents in the gathered churches did not like some of the religious ideas that, say, Walwyn or Overton, held. But there was more to it than that. There was political division over the programme that the Levellers had developed and which had had no part of their common history with the churches. It was new, born as a predominantly political response to the events of the revolution. And reinforcing this difference in politics was a social difference. In his *Merchants and Revolution* Robert Brenner follows Tolmie's analysis but puts it in a wider social frame noting the connections between the leaders of the Independent churches and the new merchants that he sees as a decisive force in the revolution. Indeed, they are often the same people. He charts how the Independents broke from the Levellers precisely over the question of democracy, some retreating from reform in national politics to reform of London government where they had more at stake and more control.⁹¹ Brenner's treatment of Tolmie's argument provides a model for the handling of the religious dimension of the English revolution.

And if the question of the religious affiliation of the Levellers has sometimes been neglected, it is also the case that it can be overstated. In his introduction to *The English Levellers* collection of texts Andrew Sharpe suggests the Levellers only justification for their arguments 'derived from one's Christian duty to seek and speak God's truth'. Sharpe ignores their appeals to the rights of free-born Englishmen, the Common Law and to the theory of the Norman Yoke, essentially secular arguments.⁹² Rachel Foxley's 'John Lilburne and the Citizenship of "Free-Born

⁹¹ R Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution* (Cambridge, CUP, 1993) p. 533-541.

⁹² A Sharp (ed.), p. xix. G E Aylmer's introduction to his 1975 selection of Leveller writings is much more careful in its analysis. G E Aylmer (ed.), *The Levellers and the English Revolution* (London, Thames and

Englishmen’ establishes by careful analysis of Lilburne’s writings that he developed notions of a uniform and inclusive citizenship and of democratic rights that were independent of religious justifications.⁹³ Elsewhere Foxley argues,

The standard view of the nature of the political society which the Levellers endorse is that it is a form of popular sovereignty—as distinct from the parliamentary sovereignty which some parliamentarians had already advocated. Scott speaks of the Levellers’ key demand as “popular self-government through representatives”.⁹⁴

Unlike Murray Tolmie, Mark Kishlansky is a representative revisionist figure. His ‘The Army and the Levellers: The Roads to Putney’ is a systematic attempt to reduce the role of the Levellers in the radicalisation of the army and therefore in the events which attend the peak of the revolution in the years 1647-1650.⁹⁵ The core of the argument is this: the rank and file of the army were mostly concerned with pay and disbandment, their political consciousness only grew slowly through this period and it had relatively little to do with the Levellers. The army wanted unity and was resistant to the Levellers who they saw as divisive. In short: the military workers weren’t political; they were deferential to their bosses and didn’t want to be mixed up with ‘outside agitators’.

Kishlansky has been contradicted in an effective manner by Austin Woolrych’s account of the Putney Debates and the events surrounding them, *Soldiers and Statesmen*, and by Ian Gentles work on the New Model Army and Norah Carlin’s examination of the Levellers’ organisation in London.⁹⁶ But, oddly, Kishlansky’s actual account of events is much more Marxist, Leninist

Hudson, 1975). See also the valuable account of Walwyn’s life and ideas in J R Michael and B Taft (eds.) *The Writings of William Walwyn* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1989) pp. 1-51.

⁹³ R Foxley, ‘John Lilburne and the Citizenship of “Free-Born Englishmen”’ in *The Historical Journal*, 47, 4 (2004), pp. 849–874.

⁹⁴ R Foxley, ‘Problems of Sovereignty in Leveller Writings’, *History of Political Thought*, Vol. XXVIII. No. 4 (Winter 2007).

⁹⁵ M Kishlansky, ‘The Army and the Levellers: The Roads to Putney’, in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Dec., 1979) pp. 795-824. A similar approach is taken by John Morrill and Phillip Baker, ‘The Case of the Armie Truly Re-stated’ in M Mendle (ed.), pp. 103-124. But, as Rachel Foxley comments in her review of Mendle, this approach ‘ultimately creates as many problems of interpretation as it solves’. See R Foxley, *The Historical Journal*, 46, (2003) p. 1010.

⁹⁶ Kishlansky’s full account is available in his *The Rise of the New Model Army* (Cambridge, CUP, 1979). See also A Woolrych, *Soldiers and Statesmen, The General Council of the Army and its Debates* (Oxford, OUP, 1987), I Gentles, *The New Model Army* (Oxford, Balckwell, 1992), N Carlin, ‘Leveller Organization in London’ in

even, than he might be happy to acknowledge. Properly understood a Marxist analysis of the relationship between an organised militant group and a wider mass during a revolutionary upheaval would be likely to stress the fact that at the outset the ideas of the minority and those of the mass will be at least partially opposed, but that under the impact of events the radicalisation of the mass and the process of learning how to respond to this on the part of the organised minority raises the possibility of an effective political alliance. As part of this process Levellers and elected agitators grew together~before Putney, at Putney, after Putney. Nor should the impulse for unity surprise us. The argument at Putney was an argument within the revolutionary camp. Such arguments are always disciplined by the relations between the revolutionary camp and counter-revolutionary forces. This is especially so when the conflict takes the form of civil war. One only has to think of the Spanish Civil War to see a related dynamic, especially in Barcelona. What Kishlansky thinks is an account which undermines a Marxist understanding of the revolutionary process actually tends to confirm it.

There are also some broader theoretical issues that have been raised by the revisionist debate that should be considered as part of this discussion. Some of the most frequently recurring, like the concepts of anachronism and teleology, I examine in the conclusion of this thesis.

After revisionism

Revisionism was essentially a negative intellectual trend in the sense that its leading figures could find broad agreement on what they were against but had no common account of the English Revolution that could replace those that they criticised. Localism, the accidental nature of the revolution, a return to the study of elite politics, a stress on the continuity of British history in the 17th century were elements that it was hard to combine in a convincing synthesis. As Mark Kishlansky declared in his overview of the revolution, *A Monarchy Transformed*, 'I believe that no synthesis of modern scholarship can result in a single, coherent, up-to-date narrative, and I have not chosen to provide one...Beyond the opening chapter, there is nothing on social, economic or women's history; beyond the analytic discussion in Chapter 2, little on local history...There is

The Historical Journal, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Dec., 1984) pp. 955-960. See also N Carlin, 'The Levellers and the Conquest of Ireland in 1649', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (June, 1987), pp. 269-288.

no treatment of intellectual life here~of literature, philosophy, science, or fine arts.⁹⁷

Consequently *A Monarchy Transformed* is much less striking than Kishlansky's essays on the Levellers and the army.

In a way, revisionism was never only about the English Revolution. Very similar arguments were deployed at much the same time about the French and the Russian Revolutions.

Moreover, the revisionists depended on a wider conservative turn in social theory. The Althusserian school of the 1970s, which became the post-structuralist school, which became the post-modernist school which fed the 'linguistic turn', provided a theoretical tool-box for the revisionists and those that came after them.⁹⁸

One important effect of revisionism has been to marginalise an impressive body of work by Marxist historians. Even now it is common to focus on the work Christopher Hill to the exclusion of other work by Marxists. Brian Manning's imaginative reinterpretation of the class analysis of the English revolution was developed across five major works beginning with *The English People and the English Revolution* (1976) and ending with *Revolution and Counter Revolution in England, Ireland and Scotland 1658-60* (2003).⁹⁹ Manning's work reached publication during the high tide of revisionism with the result that it received limited attention and was too easily dismissed.¹⁰⁰ For Manning the central political agency in the revolution was the 'middling sort', a contemporary term that Manning adopted to avoid revisionist charges of anachronism. This refurbished class analysis, significantly different from that in Hill's later work, allowed Manning to revisit the Levellers and to reaffirm their centrality to the events that determined the outcome of the revolution.

⁹⁷ M Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed*, p. x-xi.

⁹⁸ For some critical accounts of these developments see E P Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London, Merlin, 1978) pp193-397, J Rees, *The Algebra of Revolution* (London, Routledge, 1998) pp. 290-302, A Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism* (Cambridge, Polity, 1989), C Norris, *Uncritical Theory* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1992), M O'Brien, 'Postmodernism and British History' in J Rees (ed.), *Essays on Historical Materialism*, chapter 6.

⁹⁹ B Manning, *The English People and the English Revolution, 1649: The Crisis of the English Revolution* (London, Bookmarks, 1992), *Aristocrats, Plebeians and Revolution in England 1640-1660* (London, Pluto Press, 1996) *The Far Left in the English Revolution 1640-1660* (London, Bookmarks, 1999), *Revolution and Counter Revolution in England Ireland and Scotland 1658-60* (London, Bookmarks, 2003)

¹⁰⁰ For one overview of the academic reception of Manning's work see I Gentles, 'Soldiers, Levellers and the "Middle Sort" in the English Revolution', <https://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/lh/article/viewFile/5253/4449>

Robert Brenner's *Merchants and Revolution* was less concerned with agency in a narrow sense but it did provide a long-term social and economic model of the revolution. Other work sympathetic to Brenner's approach, by Ellen Meiskins Wood and Neal Wood, dealt with ideology and the growth of capitalism in *A Trumpet of Sedition*. Norah Carlin provided a modern Marxist contribution to the debate about the causes of the revolution. James Holstun achieved the seemingly impossible task of directly confronting the post-modernists on their own theoretical ground while simultaneously providing an anti-revisionist history of radicalism in the revolution in *Ehud's Dagger*.¹⁰¹ Some of the most interesting detailed insights into the Levellers have come from histories with a wider focus than the Levellers themselves, such as Keith Lindley's *Popular Politics and Religion in Civil War London*. Indeed, sometimes the focus has been on the enemies of the Levellers in, for instance, Robert Ashton's *Counter-Revolution* and Ann Hughes' study of Thomas Edwards' *Gangraena*.¹⁰²

Both revisionism and post-modernism have now run their course leaving behind scepticism of 'grand narratives' but no identifiable general theory (precisely because the theory was that there is no general theory). In their wake the historians of the Levellers in the English Revolution have begun to produce some interesting work. Nicholas Tyacke has argued that as the 1980s 'a new group of historians has emerged, often collectively referred to as "post-revisionists"' whose work 'at least implicitly' incorporates insights from early Marxist and liberal interpretive models.¹⁰³ Ann Hughes produced a valuable non-revisionist account of the causes of the revolution in 1991.¹⁰⁴ In 2000 Sarah Barber produced the first full length biography of Henry Marten, *A Revolutionary Rogue*. Barber eschews involvement in the wider controversies about the Levellers. But her valuable, straight-forward account, like Marten's life and political history

¹⁰¹ E Meiskins Wood and N Wood, *The Trumpet of Sedition, Political Theory and the Rise of Capitalism 1509-1688* (London, Pluto Press, 1997), E Meiskins Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism* (London, Verso, 1991), N Carlin, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1999), J Holstun, *Ehud's Dagger, Class Struggle in the English Revolution* (London, Verso, 2000)

¹⁰² K Lindley, *Popular Politics and Religion in Civil War London* (Aldershot, Scolar, 1997), R Ashton, *Counter-Revolution, The Second Civil War and its Origins, 1646-8* (New Haven, Yale, 1994), A Hughes, *Gangraena and The Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford, OUP, 2004).

¹⁰³ N Tyacke, 'Introduction: locating the 'English Revolution'', in N Tyacke (ed.), *The English Revolution c. 1590-1720*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁰⁴ A Hughes, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Basingstoke, MacMillan, 1991).

itself, could not be more at variance with the revisionist thesis.¹⁰⁵ Antonia Southern's *Forlorn Hope*, her account of the lives of five leading Levellers, has many of the same virtues.¹⁰⁶ More recently, David Como's work of historical reconstruction has resulted in the attribution to William Walwyn of a pamphlet whose authorship was previously unknown. And more generally his 'Secret Printing, the Crisis of 1640 and the Origins of Civil War Radicalism' has opened a window on the early formation of the Levellers. This is an important contribution to an area of study too long neglected and, taken together with Tolmie's work, begins to give us the elements of a pre-history of the Leveller movement.¹⁰⁷

Rachel Foxley's recent work has culminated in her *The Levellers, Radical Thought in the English Revolution* which consistently undermines much of the revisionist case against the Levellers, focussing on their contribution to the ideological ferment of the revolutionary decades.¹⁰⁸ Jason Peacey has contributed a careful survey of the way in which the opponents of the Levellers used their own printing presses to respond to the Levellers' pamphlet campaigns. His work shows that the Levellers and their Presbyterian and Independent rivals developed a certain symmetry of method if not of aim in addressing the audience awakened to political debate by the revolution. In another article, 'John Lilburne and the Long Parliament', Peacey traces the connections between Lilburne and his 'powerful friends at Westminster'. Peacey attributes some of Lilburne's difficulties to rivalries at Westminster rather than to his radical ideas. This is a valuable reminder of how fluid the social structure can become in revolution. But we should be careful not to remain within a binary explanation of Lilburne's predicament~either it was his ideas or elite rivalry that caused the problems he faced. We should consider the fact that it

¹⁰⁵ S Barber, *A Revolutionary Rogue, Henry Marten and the English Republic* (Stroud, Sutton, 2000). Though not about the Levellers, Geoffrey Robertson's account of the life of John Cook in his *The Tyrannicide Brief, The Story of the Man who sent Charles I to the Scaffold* (London, Chatto and Windus, 2005) ploughs a similarly engaging furrow.

¹⁰⁶ A Southern, *Forlorn Hope, Soldier Radicals of the Seventeenth Century* (Lewes, The Book Guild, 2001).

¹⁰⁷ D Como, 'An Unattributed Pamphlet by William Walwyn: New Light on the Prehistory of the Leveller Movement' in *The Huntington Library Quarterly*; 2006; 69, 3 and 'Secret Printing, The Crisis of 1640, and the Origins of Civil War Radicalism' in *Past and Present*, No. 196 (August 2007).

¹⁰⁸ R Foxley, *The Levellers, Radical Thought in the English Revolution* (Manchester, MUP, 2013). For my longer assessment of Foxley's book see the Institute of Historical Research, Reviews in History: <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1519>

might have been the unique organisational form that embodied Leveller ideas, as well as the ideas themselves, which made Lilburne a threatening figure.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

The transmission of the history of the Levellers through the generations since the 17th century has been an uneven and discontinuous process. We can identify three major factors affecting how this history has been understood.

The first is the political environment in each succeeding phase of social development, including the strength and nature of radical currents within society. From the restoration to the rise of neo-liberalism (and its academic correlates) there have been times when the Levellers were seen as unacceptable politically or unimportant historically. There have also been times, the early 19th century birth of the workers movement, the late 19th century apex of liberal progressivism, the 1940s to the 1970s, when the broader social and political environment seemed more conducive to recovering the Leveller history and proclaiming its importance.

Secondly, the experience of subsequent revolutionary eruptions, especially the American and French revolutions, the European Revolutions of 1848 and the Russian Revolution, impact on our understanding of previous revolutions. But this impact is always mediated. The effect of the Russian Revolution in Britain, for instance, was mediated first by the crisis of the 1920s and 1930s, the rise of fascism and the Second World War. It was mediated again by the political forces~liberal, left Labour and Communist Party~that recovered the Leveller history for the 20th century. And it was mediated a third time by the precise dispositions of the individual authors within this matrix. Increasingly from the 1950s onwards the character of academic discussion in newly expanded universities has shaped what is said about the Levellers. This has important advantages over narrowly instrumental political history of the Whig and Tory variety.

¹⁰⁹ J Peacey, 'The hunting of the Leveller: the sophistication of parliamentary propaganda, 1647–53', *Historical Research*, vol. 78, No. 199 (February 2005) and 'John Lilburne and the Long Parliament', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Sep., 2000). This last can usefully be read alongside G E Aylmer, 'Gentlemen Levellers?', *Past and Present*, No. 49 (Nov., 1970), pp. 120-125

But the academy also tends to de-politicise and compartmentalise in a way which is unhelpful in the study of dynamic, society-wide social upheavals.

Finally, the condition of historical knowledge and the degree to which this knowledge is widely known in any given period configures our understanding of the Levellers. Perhaps this is the most under-examined element in understanding the historical reception of Leveller history.

There can be no tradition and no debate where there is no knowledge. That is why the discovery of the *Clarke Papers* and the publication of the Leveller tracts in the 1940s mark turning points in the reception of the Levellers every bit as much as wider social developments.

Chapter 2

The Levellers and public space

Many kinds of public political activity mushroomed when the Long Parliament met. Street protests were an important factor in the early history of the revolution and remained so for its duration. Protest within the national Church and alternatives to it took on a new significance. Unsurprisingly political meetings in taverns became both more frequent and more open.¹ There were precedents in all these cases. Street protest did not begin with the meeting of the Long Parliament, disputation in the national Church went back to its foundation, and political discussion had often taken place in taverns, some of which was oppositional.² But the scale, breadth and, in some cases, radicalism of these phenomena grew beyond all historical precedent when the revolution broke out, as contemporaries noted.

Streets and localities, taverns and churches will be treated in separation for analytical purposes in this chapter, but of course they did not actually exist in separation. London, even including its rapidly growing suburbs, was a walkable city in the 1640s. Its narrow streets were crammed with churches and taverns. John Venn could send a note to the apprentices of the walled City to bring them down to Westminster while a protest was going on.³ In the heart of the City it would only take about 10 minutes to walk from John Goodwin's church or Samuel How's preaching place at the Nags Head, both in Coleman Street, past the Levellers' taverns of the Windmill and

¹ V Pearl, *London and the Outbreak of the Puritan Revolution* (Oxford, OUP, 1961), B Manning, *The English People and the English Revolution* (second edn, London, Bookmarks, 1991), K Lindley, *Popular Politics and Religion in Civil War London* (Aldershot, Scolar, 1997), M Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints* (Cambridge, CUP, 1977).

² See D Cressy, *Dangerous Talk* (Oxford, OUP, 2010) Chs. 7 and 8.

³ *Persecutio Undecima* (London, 1648) pp. 64-65. E470[7].

the Whalebone, both in Lothbury, to John Wildman's lodging at the Saracen's Head in Friday Street. A visit to a secret press in Bishopsgate or Southwark might take no more than 20 minutes. Proximity can produce political intensity and is a facilitator of political organisation. The Levellers emerged from this environment. This is where they learnt organisational methods which would later be practised in the Leveller movement.

In the streets and localities

Town squares, streets and open spaces, churches and taverns were appropriated for public political use as the revolution developed and nowhere more so than in London. But even before the revolution some urban areas were associated with radicalism. The Coleman Street Ward of the City is one of the best known examples. The St. Stephen's parish of Coleman Street was noted for disorders in 1617, 1636 and 1642. The St Stephen's parishioners had gained the unusual right to elect their vicar at the dissolution of the monasteries, one of only 13 London parishes that could do so. Nearby St Mary's Aldermanbury, elected Edmund Calamy. St Annes, Blackfriars, elected William Gouge in 1608.⁴ In 1624 Puritan John Davenport was elected to the living in St Stephens by 65 votes to five against the Archbishop of Canterbury's chaplain Aaron Wilson. Davenport was reported to the High Commission in 1631 and again in in 1632. When Laud became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633 Davenport went into hiding for three months. He then resigned at a secret meeting of vestry members and fled to Amsterdam just ahead of five men sent to arrest him.⁵ He was replaced by another Puritan preacher John Goodwin, elected at a large general vestry meeting in December 1633. To Royalist waterman and poet John Taylor he was 'the red dragon of Coleman Street'.⁶ Among Goodwin's supporters was Coleman Street newcomer Isaac Penington, future MP, Lord Mayor and a key figure in the opening phase of the revolution. When the five members flew from the King's grasp they headed to Penington's house in Coleman Street.⁷ Independent printer Henry Overton, publisher

⁴ J Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution* (Woodbridge, Boydell, 2006) p. 44.

⁵ J Coffey, *John Goodwin...*, p. 45.

⁶ B Capp, *The World of John Taylor the Water Poet* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1994) p. 178.

⁷ D A Kirby, 'The Radicals of St. Stephen's, Coleman Street, London, 1624-1642', *Guildhall Miscellany*, Vol. 3, No.2 (April, 1970) pp. 101-108. D A Kirby, 'The Parish of St. Stephen's, Coleman Street, London: A Study in Radicalism, c. 1624-1664' (B. Litt, Oxford University, 1969). Another account of Coleman

of Goodwin's pamphlets, owned a bookshop at the entrance to Popes Head Alley, off Lombard Street.

Several inhabitants of the parish were involved in the New England Company and the Massachusetts Bay Company. Francis Bright of St. Stephens, the first minister to agree to emigrate, was elected to the Colony council in 1629, quarrelled with his fellow emigrants and returned to be Goodwin's curate at St Stephens from 1631 to 1640. Sir Nathaniel Barnardiston bought a house in Coleman Street in 1633. He was a friend of John Winthrop, the first governor of Massachusetts who married into the family of Thomas Rainsborough. In 1633 Henry Overton was acting as an intermediary between preacher Henry Jessey and John Winthrop.⁸ John Davenport returned secretly to Coleman Street to organise 33 families to emigrate to New England. Among them was Nathaniel Rowe, son of future regicide Owen Rowe. They founded New Haven as a 'Bible Commonwealth ...of the extremest type'.⁹

John Goodwin was radical but not as radical as some of those in the gathered churches in his parish. Sectarians appeared in the ward in the 1630s. There were Baptists in White's Alley off Coleman Street, plus two other sectarian congregations in the parish some time before 1639. Samuel How, of whom more later, took over John Canne's conventicle in 1633. Some years before Goodwin and Thomas Edwards became major disputants across the Independent-Presbyterian divide, Goodwin was worried enough about the gathered congregations to get Edwards to preach against 'Apostacie and falling into Errors' in St. Stephens in 1638.¹⁰ In 1646 Edwards reported that William Walwyn's friend and a leading Leveller, Thomas Lambe, as a soap boiler whose Church 'meets in Bell-Alley in Colemanstreet'. He could be also be found preaching as far afield as Surrey, Essex and Hampshire.¹¹ Another Coleman Street stalwart

Street can be found in A Johns, 'Coleman Street', in *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (March 2008).

⁸ J Coffey, *John Goodwin...*, pp. 48-49.

⁹ D A Kirby, 'The Radicals of St. Stephen's...', pp.103-104, 111-113.

¹⁰ D A Kirby, 'The Radicals of St. Stephen's...', p. 114.

¹¹ Confusingly there are two Baptist preachers, both with Leveller associations, both with the same name though sometimes with variant spellings. Thomas Lambe was a soapboiler and preacher in the Spittlefields/Whitechapel area, originally from Colchester. Thomas Lamb was a merchant from Coleman Street. The former was an important Leveller activist, although both had an association with William Walwyn. See M Tolmie, 'Thomas Lambe, Soapboiler, and Thomas Lambe, Merchant, General Baptists' in

separatist with associations with John Lilburne, William Kiffin, could be found in Kent where he 'did a great deal of hurt'.¹² Worse still, as far as Edwards was concerned, 'there are women...who have preached weekly' including 'one Lace-woman, that sells Lace in Cheapside, & dwells in Bel-Alley in Colemanstreet'.¹³ This was the Baptist preacher Mrs Attaway from Lambe's church.¹⁴

Two of John Goodwin's parishioners were secret printers. Henry Overton was hauled before the Ecclesiastical Commission in 1632 and 1633 for printing *Rome's Ruin*. Rice Boye, the second printer, was charged before the High Commission alongside Prynne, Bastwick and Burton in 1637. Edmund Chillenden, future Agitator and sometime Leveller ally, was involved with a secret press in 1637. Future Levellers Nichols Tue and Richard Overton ran presses in Coleman Street. Goodwin was said to be a close associate of those that controlled the secret presses.¹⁵ Goodwin was, by 1645, meeting Walwyn and Lilburne on an almost daily basis. Goodwin, for all his later disagreements with the Levellers, attended the Whitehall debates in 1649 and was supportive of the *Agreement of the People*.¹⁶

Coleman Street may have been the single most radical area of London. But it was not the only one. The parishes adjoining the City had grown enormously in the 17th century to the point where their population equalled that within the walled City. They were also outside the jurisdiction of both the City and the Bishop of London. The Rainsborough family owned houses in Southwark as well as Wapping. Chillenden, Overton and Samuel Chidley were all active in Southwark at one time or another. Chillenden and 60 others were taken by the Constables and Churchwardens of St Saviour's, Southwark, for worshipping at the house of Richard Sturges in January 1641. They said they would not go to their parish church and that they recognised 'no true Church but where the Faithful met'. Further, they thought 'the King

Baptist Quarterly 27.1 (January, 1977) pp. 4-13. G F Nuttall, 'Thomas Lambe, William Allen and Richard Baxter: an additional note', *Baptist Quarterly* 27.3 (July, 1977) pp139-140. See also ODNB entries for Thomas Lambe and Thomas Lamb.

¹² T Edwards, *Gangraena*, pt. I (London, 1646) pp. 92-93.

¹³ T Edwards, *Gangraena*, pt. I, p. 84.

¹⁴ A Hessayon. 'Attaway, Mrs.', ODNB.

¹⁵ D A Kirby, 'The Radicals of St. Stephen's...', p. 113.

¹⁶ A Johns, 'Coleman Street', p. 43.

could not make perfect Law, for He was not a perfect Man' and they would not obey him in religious matters. They also threatened the Constables and Churchwardens 'that they had not answered for this Day's Work'. They were brought before the Lords, admonished as sectaries, instructed to attend their parish church and told they would be 'severely punished' if they did not obey. The Lords also ordered that a warning to all who 'disturb' the 'wholesome order' of the Church should be read in every parish church in London.¹⁷ In 1654 Samuel Hyland and Robert Warcup were said not to be qualified to sit as burgesses for Southwark because, among other crimes, they did not observe the Sabbath and they favoured the Levellers.¹⁸

Keith Lindley has recorded the fortunes of the Independents in Whitechapel.¹⁹ Thomas Lambe established a Baptist meeting in Norton Folgate in 1639.²⁰ Thomas Edwards complained of sectaries in Stepney, among them Katherine Chidley who 'came to Stepney' where 'shee with great deal of violence and bitterness spake against all Ministers' and drew people away to Brownism. Preacher William Greenhill tried to answer her but she was 'so talkative and clamorous, wearying him with her words, that he was glad to goe away, and so left her'.²¹ Also in Tower Hamlets, Wapping was the site of Lilburne and Wildman's meeting with their supporters in Well Yard and St. Johns Church, which the Rainsborough family helped establish in 1617, was the burial ground for both Thomas Rainsborough and his father.

There are some indications that even before the outbreak of the revolution the open spaces around the City were being used for oppositional political purposes. The author of *Persecutio Undecima* thought that from the early 1630s 'so many Military yards in London, Westminster and Southwark, and other places' were being used by 'Sectaries in London' to draw others into those 'Artillery Gardens' to exercise 'feates of armes'. Some came as a pastime, but the 'Brethern' saw this as preparation 'against a time of need'. Indeed,

¹⁷ *Journal of the House of Lords*, Vol. 4, 1629-1642 (1767-1830) pp. 134-135. Although the Lords also told ministers to forbear from introducing rites and ceremonies beyond what was approved.

¹⁸ TNA: PRO, SP 18/74 f. 132.

¹⁹ K Lindley, 'Whitechapel Independents and the English Revolution', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Mar., 1998).

²⁰ D A Kirby, 'The Parish of St. Stephen's', p. 185.

²¹ T Edwards, *Gangraena*, pt. I, pp. 79-80.

above a yeare before any face of war appeared...its well knowne scarce a Sectary in London but had stored himself with armes, to furnish each boy in his house; and many Porters loaded with Muskets, have beene seene carried in the Evenings, into the Houses of men, notoriously disaffected in Religion, who conveyed Armes, and Trayterous Libels, and Observations, printed at publick charge to their Countrey Chapmen.²²

This may sound a little conspiratorial but in late 1641 John Dillingham reported to Lord Montague that ‘there is now nothing sought for so much as guns and trimming up old ones’. And at the same time a newsbook urged, ‘I say still, provide weapons, get muskets, powder and shot. Let not the Popish party surprise us with a riding crop only in our hands’. The following day it reported that this would not be easy since ‘there is a great ado made for arms and in vain, for there is not any muskets or other guns to be bought, nor iron to make them of, so great is the fears of the people’.²³

The Honourable Artillery Company (HAC) was certainly a home for many radicals. The Company had been incorporated under Henry VIII in 1507 to train men for the defence of the realm and it acquired the New Artillery Ground at Bunhill Fields in 1641. The Company declined after the defeat of the Armada, but was rebuilt in the years 1611 to 1644, holding continuous annual parades, feast days and sermons at City churches.²⁴ The HAC had Royal patronage but it also contained a remarkable radical presence which ultimately decided its allegiance in the civil war. The admissions book of the Company records an impressive number of radicals who joined before the revolution. Praise God Barebone was a member. In 1631 Henry Overton joined. Thomas Pride learnt his military trade in the Company, joining in August 1640. George Joyce joined in 1642, possibly the later Cornet Joyce.²⁵ John Bradley was

²² *Persecutio Undecima*, pp. 56, 58.

²³ HMC, Montague Manuscripts (1900) pp. 137-139.

²⁴ G A Raikes, *The Ancient Vellum Book of the Honourable Artillery Company* (London, 1890) pp. vii-viii, xiv.

²⁵ G A Raikes, *The Ancient Vellum Book*, pp. xii, 45, 46, 58, 68. Though Raikes claim that the John Milton who became a member in 1635 is the poet is untrue. This John Milton was from St Dunstan’s in the East, a Captain in the White Regiment and taken prisoner at Cheriton. *Cromwell Association Directory of Army Officers* (British History Online, forthcoming). I’m very grateful to Tim Wales for allowing me pre-publication access to this material.

admitted to the Honourable Artillery Company in 1626, becoming a Captain in the Trained Bands, 1639. In April 1641 he and John Venn were two of the three City Captains who presented citizens' petitions to Parliament against the Earl of Strafford.²⁶ William Shambrooke joined the Company in 1641 and became a Major of the Tower Hamlets Auxiliary Regiment in 1643 and later its Colonel. He was a member of Henry Jessey's semi-separatist (later Baptist) Congregation by 1640, and in 1644 was host to a meeting debating the validity of infant baptism. In August 1647 he was appointed Lieutenant-Colonel of the Tower Guards under Robert Tichborne. He died from a poisoned bullet at the siege of Colchester.²⁷

Future members of the Levellers may also have been members of the Artillery Company. In 1640 Francis White, perhaps the future Major who was central to events at Burford, joined. William Allin (sic) was a member, possibly the future agitator and Leveller. Allen's later presence in Holles' and Skippon's regiments may suggest this connection.²⁸ Also in 1641 Peeter (sic) Cole living in Ironmonger Lane off Cheapside joined, perhaps Overton's erstwhile partner in print.²⁹ Leveller connections with the Massachusetts Artillery Company set up by former HAC members in New England in 1637 are considerable.³⁰ William Rainsborough and his brother-in-law both joined.³¹ The first military involvement was a naval expedition to Ireland in 1642 to suppress Irish rebels, in which both William Rainsborough and Hugh Peter were involved. In 1643 Israel Stoughton, a major-general of the Bay Colony and a veteran of battles with the Pequot native Americans, led a party back across the Atlantic to join Thomas Rainsborough's regiment. Stoughton became Rainsborough's Lieutenant Colonel. So did Nehemiah Bourne who, with a past in Wapping like the Rainsboroughs, became a major in Rainsborough's regiment. Stephen Winthrop, brother-in-law to Thomas Rainsborough, became

²⁶ *Cromwell Association Directory of Army Officers* (British History Online, forthcoming).

²⁷ *Cromwell Association Directory of Army Officers*.

²⁸ P N Hardacre, 'William Allen, Cromwellian Agitator and 'Fanatic'', *Baptist Quarterly*, 19.2 (July 1962) p. 292.

²⁹ G A Raikes, *The Ancient Vellum Book*, pp. 40, 58, 59, 60, 63. For Cole's address I'm grateful to Tim Wales notes to the pre-1700 list of Honourable Artillery Company members and to HAC archivist Justine Taylor for allowing me to see these lists which the HAC are in the process of making available online.

³⁰ G Goold Walker, *Honourable Artillery Company 1537-1986* (London, 3rd edn., Honourable Artillery Company, 1986) p. 45.

³¹ A Tinniswood, *The Rainborowes, Pirates, Puritans and a family's Quest for the Promised Land* (London, Jonathan Cape, 2013) p. 90.

a captain in his regiment in 1646. Winthrop was part of the Burford mutinies in 1649. Richard Baxter thought it was returning New Englanders that disturbed the peace of the New Model Army.³²

In the 1630s in St Stephen's parish almost a third of householders in the parish appear to have been members of the HAC. Four HAC officers lived in the parish, including future regicide and one of the main armours of Parliament's army, Owen Rowe, and Robert Tichborne, also a future regicide. So was John Venn. In 1629 John Davenport, preached to the HAC. So did John Everard and William Gouge.³³ John Goodwin became a member on the 19 April 1642.³⁴ One of his Godwin's general vestrymen, Caleb Cockcroft, was brought before Star Chamber for the illegal import of gunpowder.³⁵ In the year before the civil war began 300 new members joined the HAC.

The Company provided the overwhelming majority of the officers for the Trained Bands. Among those listed in the 'joyful' homecoming of the Trained Bands after the battle of Newbury in 1643 were Captain Walter Lee, a haberdasher of Ludgate, who had broken 'the windows on Westminster Abbey' and Captain William Coleson who 'with his company carried the statues in the church of Allhallows to ye parliament'.³⁶ John Warner was, according to a Royalist observer, a 'most violent' roundhead. He was not in the Artillery Company but was a Colonel of the Green Regiment of the Trained Bands whose catchment area was the Coleman

³² S Hardman Moore, *Pilgrims, New World Settlers and the Call of Home* (New haven, Yale, 2007) pp.64-66, 71, 234 n. 52. A Tinniswood, *The Rainborowes*, pp. 149-150, 153.

³³ J Everard, *The arriereban: a sermon preached to the company of the military yardee at St. Andrewes Church in Holborne at St. Iames his day last. By Iohn Everarde student in Diuinity, and lecturer at Saint Martins in the fields* (London, printed by E G[riffin] for Thomas Walkley, and are to be sold at his shop at the Eagle and Childe in Brittaines Burse, 1618); W Gouge, *The dignitie of chivalrie set forth in a sermon preached before the Artillery Company of London, Iune xiii. 1626. By William Gouge, B. of Diuinity and preacher of Gods Word, in Blackfriars London* (London, Printed by George Miller, 1626).

³⁴ G A Raikes, *The Ancient Vellum Book*, p. 64.

³⁵ D A Kirby, 'The Radicals of St. Stephen's, Coleman Street...', pp. 111-113. D A Kirby, 'The Parish of St. Stephen's', pp. 55-58.

³⁶ R Symonds, *The Kings Army 1643*, 'The Ensignes of the Rigiments in the Citty of London, both Trayned Bands and Auxileries', British Library, Harley MSS. 986, pp. 21-22. W Lovell, *Ensignes of the Regiments in the Rebellious Citty of London, Both of Trayned Bands and Auxileries* (1643) pp. 21,31, National Army Museum, Accession No. 6807-53. G A Raikes, *The History of the Honourable Artillery Company* (London, 1878) pp. 102, 112-113, 128, 135-139. G Gould Walker, *Honourable Artillery Company 1537-1986*, pp. 54, 56, 63-64. H Foster, *A true and exact relation of the marchings of the two regiments of the trained-bands of the city of London* (London, 1643) final page. For an explanation of the relationship between the Symonds and Lovell manuscripts see H A Dillon, 'On a MS. List of Officers of the London Trained Bands in 1643', *Archaeologia* 52 (Jan. 1890) pp. 129-144.

Street and Lothbury area. He oversaw the destruction of the stained glass at St Stephens Walbrook and presented a petition against scandalous ministers to parliament in 1641.³⁷ During the Republic William Kiffin and Daniel Axtell joined.³⁸

A contemporary Royalist account of the Southwark regiment lists officers and describes some as 'violent O', meaning 'violent roundhead'. Among the violent roundheads in Southwark are Captains Hobson, 'a grocer', Captain Sowton, 'a woodmonger', Captain John Thorton, 'a fishmonger', and Captains Hobland (or Holland), a dyer, and Luke Bradby, a woolstapler, both from St Olaves.³⁹ The Southwark regiment refused to co-operate with the Presbyterian city government in 1647 and it was from here that Rainsborough's regiment led the New Model into London in August of that year.⁴⁰ Clarendon thought that 'all the factious and schismatical people about the City and suburbs would frequently...convene themselves, by the sound of a bell or other token, in the fields, or some convenient place, and receive orders from those by whom they were to be disposed'. He too mentions Southwark 'in a place where arms and magazine...were kept'. This is a reference to St George's Fields. And there was indeed, in May 1640, a great meeting of apprentices, glovers, tanners, sailors and dockhands held on what was to become a familiar rallying point for radical protest.⁴¹

Not all those who were radicals in the early years of the revolution remained so in later political divisions. In the battle for control of the Militia Committee later in the revolution some of those mentioned above were supporters of, and supported by, the Presbyterians. Others remained on the most radical wing of the revolution supported by the Independents. Some went on to play a critical role both in Prides Purge and the execution of the King. Some were Leveller supporters.

³⁷ R Symonds, *The Kings Army 1643*, 'The Ensignes of the Rigiments in the Citty of London, both Trayned Bands and Auxiluries', British Library, Harley MSS 986, p. 33. *Cromwell Association Directory of Army Officers* (British History Online, forthcoming).

³⁸ G A Raikes, *The Ancient Vellum Book*, pp. 72, 74, 103. On Harrison see also S Wright, *The Early English Baptists 1603-1649* (Woodbridge, Boydell, 2006) p206 and A Laurence, *Parliamentary Army Chaplains: 1642 – 1651* (Woodbridge, Boydell, 1990) pp. 55, 81. Edward Harrison and George Lilburne joined later, se 'Draft Entries from the Cardew-Rendle Roll' of the Honourable Artillery Company. I'm grateful to HAC archivist Justine Taylor for this private communication.

³⁹ R Symonds, *The Kings Army 1643*, 'The Ensignes of the Rigiments in the Citty of London, both Trayned Bands and Auxiluries', British Library, Harley MSS. 986, pp. 66-67.

⁴⁰ A Hughes, *Gangraena and The Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford, OUP, 2004) p. 400.

⁴¹ V Pearl, *London and the Outbreak of the Puritan Revolution*, p. 234.

John Warner was excluded from the Militia Committee in April 1647 in the Presbyterian purge of Independents. In June William Shambrooke was put out of his command. But Walter Lee, despite being jeered by peace petitioners in December 1642 as a ‘roundhead rogue’, was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel by the Presbyterian controlled committee in 1647 but displaced when the Independents regained control later in the year.⁴² None of this however detracts from the impact which the radical forces in the Artillery Company and the Trained Bands had on the early stages of the revolution.

John Lilburne was an early leader of street demonstrations. His actions at the time of his persecution by the Star Chamber are noted in Chapter 6. Even while in prison, at Whitsun 1639, he organised the distribution of petitions among apprentices in Moorfields. This in turn became a demonstration against Laud.⁴³ In May 1641 when crowds several thousand strong gathered to press the Lords for the execution of Strafford, Lilburne, now at liberty, was an identified ring leader. When one of the crowd asked Lilburne why such numbers had turned out he told them that they came for justice and that although there were six or seven thousand present now there would be forty or fifty thousand the next day. When asked how matters would end he was reported to have replied ‘If we do not have the Lieutenants life, we will have the King’s’.⁴⁴ This speech landed Lilburne in trouble. Charles directed that Lilburne be ‘apprehended’ and brought in front of the House of Lords, but the witnesses could not agree an account of the events and Lilburne remained at liberty.⁴⁵ Perhaps it was coincidence but on the very same day the Commons voted that Lilburne’s previous imprisonment by the Star Chamber was ‘illegal, and against the Liberty of the Subject; and also, bloody, wicked, cruel, barbarous, and tyrannical’ and agreed he should be awarded compensation. Henry Marten was on the committee that was appointed to prepare the case for reparations.⁴⁶

⁴² *Cromwell Association Directory of Army Officers*.

⁴³ Petition of Katherine Hadley, 21 Dec. 1641’ HMC, *Fourth Report* (1874), pp. 33-34. M A Gibb, *John Lilburne The Leveller* (London, Lindsay Drummond, 1947) p. 57.

⁴⁴ HMC, 10th Report, Appendix, pt. VI, Braye MSS, pp. 140-141

T W Strafford, *A Briefe and Perfect Relation...* (London, 1647) p. 87. B Manning, *The English People and the English Revolution*, pp. 63-64.

⁴⁵ *Journal of the House of Lords*, Vol. 4, 1629-42 (1767-1830).

⁴⁶ *Journal of the House of Commons*, Vol. 2, 1640-1643 (1802), pp. 133-134.

Lilburne was in action again when crowds besieged Westminster in late December 1641. This time they were protesting the Kings attempt to secure the Tower of London by the appointment of Colonel Thomas Lunsford. The apprentices of the City mobilised in support of the Commons' attempt to block the appointment. Even when the King withdrew the attempt to make Lunsford master of the Tower the crowds remained chanting 'No Bishops, no Bishops!'. They assaulted members of the Lords as they entered the building. Lunsford and a group of officers then drew their swords on the crowd and a running fight through the palace of Westminster ensued.⁴⁷ It was only ended when Lilburne arrived 'sword in hand', as he said himself.⁴⁸ He was at the head of about 'a hundred citizens, some six with swords, as many with cudgels'. These included sailors with truncheons. They 'came against the gentlemen thus flourishing their swords, and first with a volley of stones let fly at them, then came up close to them, half the gentlemen running away'.⁴⁹ Lunsford had to escape by wading into the Thames 'above the deepnesse of his bootes' to get away in a boat.⁵⁰ As the news spread of Lunsford's attack 'hundreds of apprentices and others came down to the parliament, with swords and staves in their hands; which caused a great uproar as well in the City as at Westminster'. In the following days Lilburne was again in the thick of the fighting as he led 'a great company' of apprentices against supporters of the Bishops. When Lilburne and Sir Richard Wiseman, who was also involved in the fight with Lunsford, arrived outside Westminster Abbey 'those within the Abbey shot at them, and some of them came forth with naked swords and...fell on them, and have wounded Sir Richard and M. Lilborne and divers others'.⁵¹ Sir Richard Wiseman 'had his braines dashed out with a stone from the wall' and died of his wounds. The apprentices collected money to pay for his funeral.⁵² William Larner printed the apprentices' broadsheet that lamented his death.⁵³

⁴⁷ *A Bloody Masacre[sic]*... (London, 1641) p4. *The Scots Loyaltie*... (London, 1642).

⁴⁸ J Lilburne, *The Legal Fundamental Liberties* (London 1649) p22. E560[14]. See also S Chidley, *The Dissembling Scot* (London, 1652) p5. E652[13].

⁴⁹ HMC, Montague MS (1900), pp. 137-138.

⁵⁰ *A Bloody Masacre[sic]*... (London, 1641) p5. *The Scots Loyaltie*... (London, 1642).

⁵¹ HMC, Montague MS (1900). pp. 137-138 *A Bloody Masacre[sic]*... (London, 1641) p. 6.

⁵² *Persecutio Undecima*, pp. 64-65. B Manning, *The English People and the English Revolution*, p. 142.

⁵³ *The Apprentices Lamentation* (London, 1642) 669. f.4[45].

Keith Lindley sees ‘a notable element of continuity so far as identifiable activists are concerned from one riot, demonstration, or petition to the next. Men such as John Lilburne, Nehemiah Wallington and Henry Boyse could usually be relied on to participate if they were able, and at a more senior level the guiding hand of citizens such as Isaac Penington and John Venn can be discerned’. Lindley goes on to argue that ‘These and other Londoners were also to feature prominently in the next phase of mass politics...Leadership and continuity, the ability to plan and coordinate popular pressure, and a confidence that there was a reservoir of spontaneous support in London, had all been demonstrated by the summer of 1641’.⁵⁴ Brian Manning agrees that the presence of Lilburne, Boyse and others points to ‘a continuity of leadership of the London mob in the years 1641 to 1642’.⁵⁵ Jordan Downs has noted that the popular mobilisations of the Winter of 1642-43 ‘reveal a history from below that travels to the top and back down again’ in which ‘the actions of petitioners *and* the subsequent manipulations of politics’ led to political escalation.⁵⁶ For the future Levellers these were formative experiences in organised politics rather than mere atomistic participation in spontaneously occurring events.

Lilburne was not the only Leveller who could use the street as a theatre of political protest. In 1646 Richard Overton was arrested in his house for illegal printing by a party of musketeers led by Robert Eeles of the Stationers Company. They initially took him to the Bull Tavern in St Margarets Hill, Southwark. Eeles told Overton that he had taken his printing press and other materials. Overton refused to answer questions and Eeles dragged him through the streets towards the river where he was taken by boat to Westminster. Overton turned the arrest into a public platform. He reports that Eeles ‘led me through the streets’ in a ‘contemptuous and disgraceful manner amongst my neighbours, being strongly guarded by armed men, as if I had been a Traytor, or a Fellow...’. The streets were full of people some of whom abused Overton in ‘base and evill language’. Overton responded by telling the crowd that he was not arrested under any proper legal authority but merely by violence and force of arms. Eeles tried to shut

⁵⁴ K Lindley, *Popular Politics and Religion in Civil War London*, p. 35.

⁵⁵ B Manning, *The English People and the English Revolution*, p. 158.

⁵⁶ J Downs, *Mobilising the Metropolis*, paper given to the Institute for Historical Research Early Modern Britain seminar. I’m grateful to the author for allowing me to see this unpublished paper.

Overton up, telling him that he was a ‘Tub-preacher’ who ‘preached in the streets...on purpose to raise a mutiny’. The guard eventually got Overton into a boat at St Mary Overies stairs and took him to the Lords to be examined. Eeles told his examiners, Lords Essex and Hunsdon, that Overton was ‘one of Lilburns Bastards’.⁵⁷ Hunsdon told Eeles to keep quiet but later himself commented that Overton was ‘Lilburn like’.⁵⁸

But even short of a protest the streets could be used for political organisation. In 1649 ‘divers Troopers’ in St Albans distributed Lilburne’s pamphlets and petitions by ‘affixing them upon posts, reading them at market places, making speeches to the people, exhorting them to joyn with them, diswading them from paying the excise’. The Troopers ‘summoned the people’ and told them that they would ‘live and dye’ with them to deliver them from the ‘new tyranny’.⁵⁹ Royalists accused the Levellers of sending out ‘pockey saints...into many counties of England.’ Lilburne himself read *Englands New Chains* before a large crowd in London in March, and solicited subscriptions from his audience’.⁶⁰ In May 1649 a report from Abingdon told that ‘proclamation hath been lately made in the name of the Levellers, throughout the Counties of Oxford, Gloucester, Worcester...for all free born people to come in to their assistance...’.⁶¹

The ability to inspire public political protest stayed with Lilburne until the close of his political career. When he was found not guilty of High Treason at the Guildhall in 1649 it became the occasion of widespread popular celebration. Lilburne’s own account recalls that was ‘attended back to the TOWER, not onely with the Joy and acclamation of his friends, but of all sorts of PEOPLE...There was Ringing of Bells, and Bonfires in many places of the City of LONDON...’.⁶² Even during his last trial in 1653 reports to the Dutch Ambassador in Paris claimed that the government ‘out of fear of insurrections and commotions’ had brought three regiments of foot and one of horse to London and marched them through the City where ‘some

⁵⁷ R Overton, *A Defiance Against All Arbitrary Usurpations* (London, 1646) pp. 13-14.

⁵⁸ R Overton, *A Defiance Against All Arbitrary Usurpations*, p. 17.

⁵⁹ *The Kingdome faithful and Impartiall Scout*, 9-16 March 1649 (London) p. 48.

⁶⁰ J Peacey, ‘The People of the *Agreements*: The Levellers, Civil War Radicalism and Political Participation’, in P Baker and E Vernon (eds.), *The Agreements of the People, The Levellers and the Constitutional Crisis of the English Revolution* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) p. 54.

⁶¹ *The Levellers Remonstrance* (London, 10 May 1649) p. 3.

⁶² *Truths Victory Over Tyrants* (London, 1649) pp. 6-7.

libels' had been 'scattered up and down not long since, that if Lilburne doe suffer death, there are twenty thousand, that will die with him'.⁶³

Taverns and Alehouses

In the 17th century, as now, taverns and alehouses performed a variety of functions well beyond that of selling drink. Some were also a place to stay. They could act as a bank, a warehouse, an exchange, a scrivener's office, a place to trade goods, and hire carriers. Some were used as wool markets, operating outside the regulations of the official market. Alan Everitt sees inns as increasingly important centres of trade, business, administration, politics and social activity in the 50 years before the calling of the Long Parliament.⁶⁴ Peter Clark has suggested we distinguish between inns, taverns and alehouses. Inns were extensive establishments with guest rooms, stables and warehouses. They sold food and wine as well as ale and beer. Taverns, especially in London, were also fairly large establishments with a number of drinking rooms furnished with panelling, paintings and plate. Alehouses were poorer establishments with rudimentary furnishing located in back-alleys, back rooms and cellars. The mainly sold ale and beer. Alehouses served the poorest and there was a considerable increase in their numbers in the century before the Civil War. Clark argues that contemporary complaint about disorder and political opposition being associated with alehouses is overstated in the period before the revolution. He is likely to be right about this, especially since there is little evidence that radicalism first grew among the very poorest sections of the population. But he pays less attention to taverns and moves too quickly over the 1640s when there is considerable evidence of radical use of at least some taverns.⁶⁵

There is some evidence of the political side of tavern life before the revolution. The King was denounced in an Oxfordshire victualing house in 1625, in a Hereford alehouse in 1628, at the King's Head in London's New Fish Street in 1631, at the Angel Inn in Stilton in 1633, in an

⁶³ T Birch (ed.), *A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe*, Vol 1, 1638-1653 (London, 1742), pp. 435-445.

⁶⁴ A Everitt, 'The English Urban Inn, 1560-1760' in A Everitt (Ed.), *Perspectives in Urban History* (London, Macmillan, 1973) pp. 104, 106, 110, 113-114.

⁶⁵ P Clark, 'The Alehouse and the Alternative Society' in D Pennington and K Thomas, *Puritans and Revolutionaries* (Oxford, OUP, 1978) pp. 47-72.

Essex tavern in 1634, and at both the Lion and Greyhound in Lavenham and the Three Horseshoes in London's Fetter Lane in 1637. In 1641 the alehouse keeper Joan Allen of Pleshey in Essex said 'she knew not the King, not cared for him...nor would not obey his authority'. She was sentenced to a month in prison, whipped and sent home to her husband.⁶⁶ There must have been enough social or religious disputation going on in the taverns for William Rowley to assume that his audience would know what a 'Taverne Accademian' was when he mentioned one in his 1633 *A Match at Midnight*.⁶⁷ Even Clark, following Christopher Hill, reports Henry Wilkinson's sermon to the House of Commons in 1646 when he said that 'alehouses generally are the Devil's castles, the meeting places of malignants and sectaries'.⁶⁸ This kind of meeting was more likely to take place in taverns than alehouses. The widow that Isaac Penington married kept an tavern in White Friars where the 'scouts' of the Puritan underground could report and where Puritan ministers would lodge so that 'when they preached in London, or there abouts, they wanted not a crowd of Followers'.⁶⁹

When the revolution broke out printed texts provoked discussion, sometimes tending to violence, in taverns like the Angel in Norwich, the Crown in Boston and the Three Trumpets at Dover.⁷⁰ From the early days of the revolution petitions were on display for subscription in taverns. In December 1641 Edward Curie told the Lord Mayor that John Greensmith, a tobacconist, came to his shop and asked if he had signed a petition to Parliament that was available for subscription at the White Lion tavern, Canning Street. When Curie replied that 'he was busy and could not go then conveniently, but however, he would not subscribe against Bishops' Greensmith told him "then you are like to have your throat cut," and went away in a discontented manner'.⁷¹ The Puritan faction were reported as having 'dayly Taverne clubs in

⁶⁶ See D Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, pp. 135, 139-140, 147, 149, 151, 153-154, 165.

⁶⁷ W Rowley, *A Match at Midnight*, <http://www.lettrs.indiana.edu/cgi-bin/eprosed/eprosed-idx?coll=eprosed;idno=P1.0204>. K Rodgers, *Signs and Taverns Round and About Old London Bridge* (London, Homeland Association, 1937) pp. 47, 143, 145. Among other Nags Heads Rodgers mentions one 'at Leadenhall/Bishopsgate Street, entrance between 153 and 155 Leadenhall Street' which sounds very much like Rowley's Nags Head.

⁶⁸ H Wilkinson, *Miranda, Stupenda* (London, 1646) p. 26. E345[7]. C Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London, Pelican, 1972) p198. P Clark, 'The Alehouse and the Alternative Society', p. 67.

⁶⁹ *Persecutio Undecima*, p55.

⁷⁰ D Cressy, *Dangerous Talk*, p189.

⁷¹ TNA: PRO, SP 16/486 f.85. The transcript reads 'Canning Street' but may be 'Cannon Street'.

each Ward' of the City. From and to these meetings information was transmitted to gatherings in private houses and 'to report to Mr. Pym and his close committee'.⁷² Newsheets could be read aloud and discussed in taverns. Pamphlets, newsheets and petitions could be collected and returned to taverns using 'Bible carriers' who ferried messages to and from 'brethern' in the country.⁷³

As we shall see below the gathered churches were also providing a base for political activity, but we should not see taverns and churches as being as distinct as they are today or as the stereotype of Puritan attitudes might lead us to imagine. For instance, in 1640, at the 'Nags-head Taverne neare Coleman-Street in the presence of about a hundred people' the cobbler Samuel How of Long Ally in Moorfields preached a sermon on the theme that 'such as are destitute of Human learning, are the learned ones and truely understand the Scriptures...' and that 'Jesus Christ was destitute of Human learning, and so his Servants ought to be also...'. The 'five Ministers' who were present were outraged, especially by How's decision to vindicate himself by having his sermon printed. He described Ministers as 'men of the Throne'. He also declared his intention to cast down the Throne and 'grind it to Powder'.⁷⁴

John Taylor's pamphlet attacking How and other separatists contains a woodcut on its cover that pictures How preaching from a barrel in the first floor room of the Nags Head.⁷⁵ John Goodwin was challenged to attend the sermon by How after he said that a man could not preach without learning. Goodwin heard How preach but then stopped the sermon from being printed. How's supporters had it printed in Amsterdam and distributed in London.⁷⁶ How's pamphlet was a best seller that ran through many reprints. The second of these came from

⁷² *Persecutio Undecima* (London, 1648) p. 60. E470[7].

⁷³ V Pearl, *London and the Outbreak of the Puritan Revolution*, p. 233-234.

⁷⁴ *The Vindication of the Cobler* (London, 1640).

⁷⁵ J Taylor, *A Swarme of Sectaries and Schematiques* (London, 1642) E158[1]. Taylor was a bitter opponent of the lower orders preaching and, later, of the Levellers. See for instance, J Taylor, *A three-fold discourse betweene three neighbours, Algate, Bishopsgate, and John Heyden the late cobbler of Houndsditch, a professed Brownist* (London, 1642) and *The Levellers directory for private preaching new vamp'd. In which, certaine formes are warranted (by the agitators)...* (London, 1648). Also B Capp, *The World of John Taylor the Water Poet* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1994) p. 178 for Taylor's attack of Henry Marten.

⁷⁶ 'To the Reader' in S How, *The Sufficiency of the Spirits Teaching* (Glasgow, 1794) p. 11. William Kiffen, Postscript, in S How *The Sufficiency of the Spirits Teaching* (London, 1683) pp. 41-42. Wing (2nd. ed.) 2953.

Richard Overton's Cloppenburg press and the edition of 1655 was printed by William Larnier.⁷⁷

How was supported by Edmund Chillenden.⁷⁸ When John Lilburne was in prison in 1640 he threatened to have his letters printed in Holland and 'if it be possible, it may be claimed upon the Posts, and made as publique as the Cobler's Sermon, that so you may if you will read it in the Streets, as you go to the Parliament house'. How died during the prison term he was given for the sermon and buried in unconsecrated ground. Lilburne said that when he died he wanted to be buried 'beside the Cobler in Finsbury Fields'.⁷⁹ William Walwyn told Goodwin, after he became a separatist, that he had moved towards the Cobler's views since they first debated.⁸⁰

A year later another gathered church was reported meeting in a tavern. This time in the 'signe of the Locke in Fleet-street'. A 'congregation of sedition' was said to flower there. It was raided by a Constable and some watchmen who found a 'Teacher was prating, his Pulpit was made of half a tub, having a black velvet cloath hanging down'. The constable left them in peace but later in the evening after a hostile crowd gathered he returned and made some arrests.⁸¹ Few however would have supported Laurence Clarkson's view that 'Tavernes I called the house of God', that those drawing the beer were messengers of god, and that Sack was a divinity. Ironically, Clarkson was arrested when he was lured to a meeting in the Four Swans in Bishopsgate.⁸²

The Levellers were part of this milieu and particular taverns were associated with the movement often with sympathetic landlords, although of course brewers and tavern keepers could be

⁷⁷ *The Sufficiencie of the Spirits Teaching* was issued in 1639, 1640, 1644, 1655, 1683 and 1689. The bibliographical information in STC attributes the 1640 edition to the Cloppenburg press, of which more in chapter 3. How's pamphlet contained one of the revolution's more amusing printer's descriptions~'Seen, Allowed and Printed, by us &c.'~in the 1639, 1640 and 1644 editions. John Lilburne's early pamphlet *A Light for the Ignorant* came out the year before the first edition of *The Sufficiencie of the Spirits Teaching* and also contains the tag 'Seene and allowed'. STC (2nd. ed.) 15591. The Larnier edition of 1655 included the tag that it 'was first printed by some friends of the Author', which may possibly mean that Larnier himself was involved with the earlier editions. The single sheet *The Vindication of the Cobler* (1640) was printed by Richard Oulton, an associate of Larniers, see note 27 of the following chapter. The 1683 edition contains a contemporary verse from *The Vindication of the Cobler* inserted at the end of How's preface which is signed with the initials 'R.O.', presumably Richard Oulton.

⁷⁸ D A Kirby, 'The Radicals of St. Stephen's, Coleman Street...', pp. 114-115.

⁷⁹ J Lilburne, *A Coppy of a Letter written...to the Wardens* (London, 1640) p. 7. D A Kirby, 'The Parish of St. Stephen's', p. 184.

⁸⁰ W Walwyn, *Walwyns Just Defence* in J R McMichael and B Taft, *The Writings of William Walwyn* (Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 1989) p. 418.

⁸¹ *An Order from the High Court[sic] of Parliament which was read on Sunday last in every church...* (London, 1641).

⁸² L Claxson [Clarkson], *The Lost Sheep Found* (London, 1660) pp. 28-29. Unfortunately those arresting Clarkson found his almanac with the names of those who distributed his pamphlets recorded in it.

found among Royalists and moderate Parliamentarians as well.⁸³ The Windmill in Lothbury was a London landmark long before it became a Leveller centre. It was recorded as ‘the Wyndemylne in Old Jury’ when in 1522 the house was named in the list of inns and taverns viewed prior to the visit to England of Charles V. It was ‘able to supply “fourteen feather-beds, and stabling for 20 horses”’. A plan of 1720 shows the main entrance to Windmill court is in Old Jewry and there is a long rambling backway from the court into Lothbury on its south side, almost opposite Founders Hall...’.⁸⁴

John Lambe, astrologer to George Villiers the Duke of Buckingham, had temporary cause to be grateful to the Windmill. On the 18th June 1628 he was returning from a playhouse through the City when he was set on by a crowd of ‘ordinary People and the Rabble’ who called him ‘a Witch, a Devil’ and ‘the Duke’s Conjuror’. He took refuge in the Windmill. But the crowd found out the ‘two Doors opening to several Streets’ and secured both of them. The vintner then threw Lambe out for fear that the crowd would pull down the tavern and that ‘the Wines in his Cellar’ would be ‘spoiled and destroyed’. The Lord Mayor sent the Guard to rescue Lambe but when the crowd saw them coming they beat Lambe so severely that he later died of the injuries. Despite Charles I’s personal concern to apprehend the killers no one was willing to give up the rioters. The killing of Lambe coincided with the presentation of the remonstrance against Buckingham and ‘so high was the Rage of the People...they would ordinarily utter these Words’:

Let Charles and George do what they can,

The Duke shall die like Doctor Lambe.⁸⁵

The Windmill is certainly a tavern not an alehouse. Both the Windmill’s size~it is a relatively large tavern at a time when the largest held no more than 200 people~and its notoriety probably served the Levellers well.

⁸³ See I Gentles, ‘Parliamentary Politics and the Politics of the Street: The London Peace Campaigns of 1642-3’ in *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 26, part 2 (2007) p. 143.

⁸⁴ B Lillywhite, *London Signs* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1972) p. 661, entries 16599 and 16600.

⁸⁵ J Rushworth, *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State*, Vol. I, 1618-29 (1721) pp. 610-627.

Thomas Edwards thought John Lilburne ‘a great stickler in the meetings at the Windmill Tavern, and drawing up petitions for the Parliament’ and that he was ‘a player at Cards, who will sit long with company at Wine and Tippling’.⁸⁶ However that may be, on 31 May 1644 Lilburne was elected to a committee of 16 at a meeting at the Windmill to decide action against the king.⁸⁷ A year later Lilburne recalled the meeting in these terms:

...there were divers persons of severall quallities, Citizens of London, and divers of them of very good quallitie, met at the Windmill tavern in the Old Jury to confer together, and to consider the good of the City and the kingdome, after so great a losse as Leicester was generally judged to be; and after a long debait of many things, the whole company then present, being about 2. or 300. chuse out about 16 persons then present by way of a Committee, to draw up a petition against the next morning, to be presented to their viue and consideration; and amongst the rest myself was one...⁸⁸

In 1646, at similar meeting at the Windmill to organise a petition, William Walwyn confronted one of his critics in the hearing of six or seven others and compelled him to apologise for spreading rumours that Walwyn was, variously, ‘a dangerous man, a Jesuite, an Anti-scripturist’ and a tempter of women into ‘lewdness’.⁸⁹ One of those who had told Walwyn of the slander against him was Peter Cole, Richard Overton’s early collaborator in secret printing in the very earliest days of the revolution.⁹⁰ Murray Tolmie records that ‘the centre of the movement in 1645 and 1646 was the Windmill Tavern’. The radical wing of the Salters Hall Independents joined Lilburne and Walwyn at the Windmill to plan a petitioning campaign aimed at countering conservative forces in the City.⁹¹

It is possible that Lilburne and Walwyn were working together earlier since they were moving in the same circles of underground printing. But the first time we hear of them together is at

⁸⁶ T Edwards, *Gangraena*, pt. I (London, 1646) p. 96. A claim contested by Lilburne and his allies.

⁸⁷ P Gregg, *Free-born John* (London, Dent, 1961) p. 116.

⁸⁸ J Lilburne, *Innocency and Truth Justified*, p4. E314[21].

⁸⁹ *The Charity of Churchmen* in W Haller and G Davies, *The Leveller Tracts* (Gloucester, Mass., Peter Smith, 1964) p. 343.

⁹⁰ *Walwyns Just Defence* in W Haller and G Davies, *The Leveller Tracts*, p. 369.

⁹¹ M Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints* (Cambridge, CUP, 1977) pp. 146-150.

this time. They were certainly both at Westminster Hall on 19 July 1645 where Walwyn came with a delegation from Salter's Hall and Lilburne was awaiting to attend the Committee for Examinations to face charges of illegal printing. Lilburne was arrested that day and Walwyn came to his defence in *England's Lamentable Slaverie*.⁹² At the time of the Ware mutiny in 1647 the Levellers were organising large meetings with the new Agitators and their supporters, like Henry Marten, in the Windmill and the Mouth taverns.⁹³

The Windmill also had a role to play in the final act of Lilburne's public political career, his treason trial in 1653. When the jury found him not guilty they were hauled before the Council of State to account for their verdict. One juror denied it, but most admitted that on the morning of the day they gave their verdict they had met at the Windmill Tavern before coming to court. Some jurors admitted that they had decided their verdict in the Windmill, though another, William Hitchcock, a woollen draper from Watling Street, said they had simply met to 'drink a pint of wine' together. They were all insistent that no attempt had been made by others to influence them in Lilburne's favour. Given the history of the Windmill Tavern this may not be a wholly credible claim. At any rate William Hitchcock also said they came back to the Windmill after they had given the verdict to enjoy another pint of wine.⁹⁴ Hitchcock had been a member of the Honourable Artillery Company.⁹⁵ He was one of three captains in the Yellow Regiment of the Trained Bands at the muster in 1643. His fellow captains were regicide Robert Tichborne and Walter Lee, the man who broke the windows at Westminster Abbey. Lee's and Hitchcock's standards are reproduced together on facing pages of William Lovell's contemporary water-colours of the Trained Bands' insignia.⁹⁶

⁹² W Walwyn, *Englands Lamentable Slaverie* (London, 1645) E304[19]. See also J R McMichael and B Taft, *The Writings of William Walwyn* (Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 1989) pp. 20-25.

⁹³ I Gentles, *The New Model Army* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1992) p. 220.

⁹⁴ *Cobbett's State Trials*, Vol. 5 (London, 1810) pp. 445-450. M A Gibb, *John Lilburne The Leveller*, p. 322.

⁹⁵ William Hitchcock is recorded in the pre-1700 Honourable Artillery Company list of members.

⁹⁶ W Lovell, *Ensignes of the Regiments in the Rebellious City of London, Both of Trayned Bands and Auxilieries* (1643) pp21-22, National Army Museum, Accession No. 6807-53. See also *The London Trained Bands Mustered in Finsbury Fields, 26 September 1643*, National Army Museum, <http://www.cgsc.edu/CARL/nafziger/643IAB.pdf> Accessed 28 May 2013. This latter document is a typescript condensation of the officers' names, ranks and the descriptions of their backgrounds as they appear under Lovell's original paintings of the flags. The original book in the archives is listed under the name 'Lovell' but the typescript is attributed to 'Lovett', but there is no doubt they refer to the same

Even more prominent than the Windmill as a centre for the Levellers was the nearby Whalebone. This too seems to have been a tavern not an alehouse. In two broadsides of July 1649 designed to hurl defiance at the authorities and raise the spirits of the ‘brethren of the Sea-green order’ Richard Overton addressed ‘the citizens of London usually meeting at the Whalebone in Lothbury behind the Royal Exchange, commonly (though unjustly) styled Levellers’. The Whalebone is by this stage so well known as a Leveller centre that it is mentioned by Overton on the title page of both pamphlets. And although Overton qualifies the use of the term Leveller on the front page he routinely uses the same term approvingly throughout both pamphlets. He calls on the ‘Levelling Bull-dogs and Bear-dogs’ to lay about their enemies and he refers to himself, Lilburne, Prince and Walwyn as ‘the four arch-Levelling Rebels in the Tower’.⁹⁷

In the same month John Lilburne wrote from the Tower ‘my true Friends, the Citizens of London etc...usually meeting at the Whalbone in Lothbury, behind the Royal Exchange, commonly (but most unjustly) stiled Levellers’.⁹⁸ ‘The Whaleboners’ became a popular nickname for the Levellers. And the Whalebone and The Mouth were referred to as ‘the Levellers two new Houses of Parliament’ in *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, where it said the ‘Juncto’ of Lilburne, ‘Southwarkian Rabbi Overton’ and Tobias Box, agitator and London agent, met with their ‘ravening Representatives’.⁹⁹ In 1649 Ireton ‘employed many Spies at severall meetings (especially) at the Whale-bone in Lothbury’ to gather intelligence on Leveller plans to oppose the Cromwellian regime.¹⁰⁰ The Mouth inn was in Aldersgate, recorded as kept near Bishopsgate in 1641.¹⁰¹ Tobias Box had been arrested leaving the Mouth on 10 November 1647 and

document. I’m grateful to Dr Alastair Massie at the Templer Centre of the National Army Museum for allowing me access to Lovell’s original book.

⁹⁷ R Overton, *Overton’s Defiance* (London, 2 July 1649) see pp. 6-7. R Overton, *The Baiting of the Great Bull of Bashan* (London, 9 July 1649) p. 2.

⁹⁸ J Lilburne, *To all the Affectors and Approvers in England of the London petition of the eleventh of September 1648* (London, 1649).

⁹⁹ *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, 9-16 November 1647, (London) p66, 69-70. P Gregg, *Free-born John*, p.229.

¹⁰⁰ *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, 8-15 May 1649 (London) pp26-27. E555[14].

¹⁰¹ *The Perfect Weekly Account*, 10-17 November 1647 (London). J P de Castro, *A Dictionary of the Principal London Taverns since the Restoration*, LMA MS. 3110/2. There are references to Inns before the Restoration in this work, as in the case of The Mouth. John Towill Rutt suggests ‘The Mouth was probably a sign of Bolougne mouth, or harbour, which is supposed to have produced the corruption of “Bull and Mouth Street”, partly on the basis it was near Petit France with its pollution of French speakers. T Burton, *Diary*

accused of having ‘severall Papers about him’. Three days later 150 weavers met at the Mouth. They spoke of co-ordinated action with the army. One of them suggested they follow the example of Naples where, he understood, ‘if any Person stand up for Monarchie there, he is immediately hanged at the Doore’.¹⁰² It was to The Mouth that the body of John Lilburne was taken in 1657 before its burial in the Bethlem new-churchyard the following day.¹⁰³

In 1647 another tavern, the Saracen’s Head in Friday Street, was at the heart of campaign to win affiliation to the Levellers’ first *Agreement of the People*. Jason Peacey refers to ‘a national campaign...being organised from London, from where copies of the Agreement were apparently despatched to ‘all quarters of the army, [and] the countries abroad’.¹⁰⁴ John Wildman’s lodgings were at the Saracen’s Head. Subscribed copies of the *Agreement of the People* were brought back to London by agents and taken to the Saracen’s Head.¹⁰⁵ In November 1647 a Royalist claimed to have come across instructions issued by the Army Agitators to the ‘Agents of the City of London for the more orderly carrying, and the more speedy effecting and bringing in the subscriptions’. These instructions speak of a high level of organisation. ‘The papers were to be delivered to ‘such faithful persons, as will be vigilant and active in the prosecution of them’. There would then be places chosen where they could meet which would be ‘most convenient, to take Subscriptions of the City or place where they reside’. One or more ‘active and faithfull man’ should be appointed ‘for each County, City, or Place’. The petitions should be brought ‘as soon as possibly they can, to the *Saracen’s Head* in Friday-street in London, where there will be Agents to receive them, or the Master of the House...will direct

of Thomas Burton, *Esq. Member in the Parliaments of Richard and Oliver Cromwell, From 1656 to 1659*, edited by John Towill Rutt (London, Henry Colburn, 1828). See editors note, Vol. III, pp. 507-508.

¹⁰² Z Grey, *An Impartial Examination of the Third Volume of Mr. Daniel Neal’s History of the Puritans*, (London, 1737) Appendix, pp129-130. I Gentles, *The New Model Army*, p221.

¹⁰³ *Mercurius Politicus*, 27 Aug.-3 Sept., 1657, pp. 1597-1598. E505[18]. *The Publick Intelligencer*, 31 Aug.-7 Sept., 1657, pp. 1874-1875. E505[19]. Pauline Gregg gives the number of mourners as 400, but her source, *London Past and Present*, gives the figure as 4000. See P Gregg, *Free-born John* (London, Dent, 1961) p. 347. T Burton, *Diary of Thomas Burton*, edited by John Towill Rutt, Vol. III, pp. 507-508.

¹⁰⁴ J Peacey, ‘The People of the *Agreements*: The Levellers, Civil War Radicalism and Political Participation’, p. 53.

¹⁰⁵ See J Wildman, *Truth’s Triumph* (London, 1648) p. 5 for his description of the Saracen’s Head as ‘my Inn’. And for Lilburne’s reference to Wildman’s lodgings at the Saracen’s Head see *A Declaration of Some Proceedings*, in W Haller and G Davies, *The Leveller Tracts 1647-1653*, p. 100.

them where they shall be received'.¹⁰⁶ In the same month the Speaker acquainted the Lords with the news, "That he hath received from *Nottingham* a Letter, with "*The Agreement of the People*" inclosed, sent down thither by an Agent, from *The Saracen's Head*, in *Friday Street, London*; stirring up the People to subscribe the Agreement; and to send the same up to *London*, to *The Saracen's Head*".¹⁰⁷ The activities at the Saracen's Head were described in 1648 as like those in the Puritan Tavern clubs at the outbreak of the revolution.¹⁰⁸

The Saracen's Head was a large inn. Merchant Taylors' records from 1656 and later plans show it as long, narrow building running most of the width of the block from Friday Street to Bread Street with a substantial yard.¹⁰⁹ It was from here that the coaches to Wiltshire, Somerset and other parts of the West Country departed.¹¹⁰ It was a great centre for carriers from all over the country, it was recorded in 1637.¹¹¹ In 1642 Nehemiah Wharton was writing that every Wednesday those that wanted news of the fate of the Parliamentary army could find a post at the Saracen's Head.¹¹² It was in the Saracen's Head that Wildman overheard Wiltshire cloth workers complaining of the dearth of work and telling that they had gathered in groups of 10 to 30 and seized corn on its way to market. They then 'divided it among themselves before their owners faces, telling them they would not starve'. Retelling this tale was part of what got Wildman into trouble when the Well-Yard meeting was reported to the Commons in January 1648.¹¹³ Elliot Vernon has suggested that Wildman was acting in concert with Henry Marten at

¹⁰⁶ *The Case of the King Stated* (dated 18 November 1647) pp. 15-16.

¹⁰⁷ *Journal of the House of Lords*, Vol. 9, 1646-1647 (1767-1830), pp. 529-531.

¹⁰⁸ *Persecutio Undecima*, p. 60.

¹⁰⁹ Merchant Taylor's company archives held at Guildhall Library, MS. 34100/29. The 1669 deed replaces one of 1656 which in turn replaces one of 1634, although this last is not preserved. The deeds maybe of the adjoining house that fronts onto Friday Street, but the sketch map gives us some idea of the proportions of the Saracen's Head. The Plan Book of 1680 gives a more detail view, and since the City worked to keep the outline of the building unchanged after the Great Fire we can assume the Saracen's Head would have looked like this in the 1640s. See MS 34216, p. 2. I am grateful to Stephen Freeth, archivist of the Merchant Taylors, for information on this issue.

¹¹⁰ 'Sandy's Row - Savage's Rents', in H A Harben, *A Dictionary of London* (1918). J P de Castro, *A Dictionary of the Principal London Taverns since the Restoration*, LMA MS. 3110/3. See also the useful digest of coaching inns at: <http://www.turnpikes.org.uk/Inn%20Summary.htm>

¹¹¹ J Taylor, *The carriers cosmographie or A briefe relation, of the innes, ordinaries, bosteries, and other lodgings in, and neere London, where the carriers, waggons, foote-posts and bigglers, doe usually come* (London, 1637). STC 23740.

¹¹² TNA: PRO, SP 16/492 f. 49.

¹¹³ J Wildman, *Truth's Triumph* (London, 1648) pp. 3-5.

this point and that the Saracen's Head's coaching routes to the West that ran through Marten's home territory in Berkshire may have been convenient for that reason.¹¹⁴

The Nags Head tavern 'by Blackwell Hall' is associated with the Levellers because on the 15th November 1649 the preliminary meeting to draft the final *Agreement of the People* took place there. The committee that met there was composed of five Independents, four army officers, and included Henry Ireton, and four Levellers, among them Lilburne and Wildman. Although there was more than one Nags Head tavern in close proximity in the City at this time, this seems to have been the same tavern at which Samuel How preached.¹¹⁵

Mark Hildesley was a member of John Goodwin's congregation and owned the Star Inn located in St. Stephens. From early 1645 Goodwin and Hildesley were holding daily meetings and 'intimate discourse' with Lilburne, Walwyn, Henry Burton and Hugh Peters. In June 1647 Peters, Cromwell, and others met at the Star before the seizure of the King. In December 1647 Hildesley was one of those chosen to organise the implementation of the *Agreement of the People*. Cromwell, Pride, Peters and others also met at the Star before the Kings trial.¹¹⁶

In the 1650s the Leveller leader John Wildman himself bought Nonsuch House in Bow Street, Covent Garden. It was run by his servant William Parker who had acted as a courier between Wildman and Leveller agitator Edward Sexby. Described as both tavern and later as a coffee house, the Nonsuch marks a transition from the tavern culture of the 1640s to a later form of radical gathering place. The Nonsuch House Club, of which Wildman was the chair, was a

¹¹⁴ Private communication, 27 April 2013.

¹¹⁵ As Blackwell Hall and Coleman Street are essentially the same place K Rodgers, *Signs and Taverns Round and About Old London Bridge*, p. 145. C H Firth (ed.), *Clarke Papers*, Vol. II (London, Royal Historical Society, 1894) p. 256. There were other Nags Heads which 'stood a little to the East of Harp Lane on the North side of Thames Street in a court called Wilson's yard', and at 'at Leadenhall/Bishopsgate Street, entrance between 153 and 155 Leadenhall Street'. See Rodgers, pp. 47, 143. And another Nags Head is recorded at 'Cheapside, without Temple Bar', see John Taylor, the Water Poet, *An Alphabet of English Inn Signs*, p. 24.

¹¹⁶ *Walwyn's Just Defence*, in J R McMichael and B Taft (eds.), *The Writings of William Walwyn* (Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 1989) p. 886, D M Wolfe, *Leveller Manifestoes of the Puritan Revolution* (New York, Frank Cass, 1967) p. 344. D A Kirby, 'The Parish of St. Stephen's, Coleman Street, London: A Study in Radicalism, c. 1624-1664' (B. Litt, Oxford University, 1969) pp. 118, 134-135. W L Sachse (ed.), *The Diurnal of Thomas Rugg 1659-1661*, Camden Third Series, Vol. 91 (London, Royal Historical Society, 1961) p. 118.

forerunner of Harrington's more famous Rota Club. The Privy Council cross-examined Wildman and Harrington about their connections and their Republicanism at the Restoration.¹¹⁷

Leveller printer William Larnier operated from the Blackamore in Bishopsgate. And in the final phase of the Leveller movement the mutiny for which Robert Lockyer was executed was played out in two Bishopsgate taverns, as we shall see in Chapter 6.

The Churches

In 1641 there were complaints about separatists giving the impression to 'every Ploughman' and 'every Tradesman' that they could pronounce on religion. These were once 'but a handful' that had now become so bold that they might 'overthrow the whole Land'. Indeed, it was claimed, 'They are now growne to that height of impudence, that it is a common thing for them to command the preacher what he shall say, and no more'. Just as the anti-Bishop protests were gathering in late 1641, this included thrusting a note into the hand of the minister at Christchurch in London and insisting that he read it to the congregation. It told him to 'move the Congregation of Saints here met, to joyne with you, that would be pleased to assist the Apprentices and others with strength and power and to blesse their undertakings, which are speedily to root out ...all innovations of Bishops, and Clergie'.¹¹⁸ Such complaints reached flood tide in the mid-decade work of Thomas Edwards. His three part *Gangraena* contained over 600 pages of outrage at Sectaries, Independents, gathered Churches, the New Model Army, and political radicals. Other prime targets were mechanic, women and young preachers.¹¹⁹ But Edwards was not alone in objecting to 'Insolent' orders about protests that were 'throwne into Church-wardens houses by unknown hands'. From Sunday sermons or lectures the congregation learnt 'not only what was done the weeke before, but also what was to be done in Parliament the weeke following; besides the information, which their Pulpits gave the people,

¹¹⁷ M Ashley, *John Wildman* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1947) pp. 103, 119, 145, 176-177.

¹¹⁸ *An Order from the High Court [sic] of Parliament which was read on Sunday last in every church...* (London, 1641).

¹¹⁹ T Edwards, *Gangraena*, pts I, II and III (London, 1646). A Hughes, *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford, OUP, 2004).

for coming in tumults to the House for justice'.¹²⁰ The Royalist *Mercurius Elencticus* complained that papers had been pasted up 'in many Churches, and upon severall Gates and Posts throughout the City, inciting the People to rise up as one Man'. When this was reported to the Commons Henry Marten defended the protestors right to do so 'wondering why anyone should want to restrain the people from seeking redress for their grievances'.¹²¹

Part of the upheaval that the revolution produced in the church were the campaigns, often supported by petitioning, to have insufficiently Puritan ministers replaced by more godly preachers. In December 1640 a Commons' committee was established with this aim in mind; its members included Isaac Penington and Oliver Cromwell.¹²² Its aims were broadcast in a pamphlet from Henry Overton's secret press.¹²³ One hostile account records that the 'Puritan Faction in the House of Commons' encouraged 'any Knave, or Foole in the Parish' to oppose their Minister and that 'in a short space above two thousand Petitions were brought in against the Clergy'. Richard Overton's Martin Marprelate pamphlets are singled out as especially damaging. Petitioning was augmented by direct action: 'its too well known how a few...zealous...young fellowes with their wenches rushing into any Church in London could...sing a whole parish out of their Religion (a trick they had from the Dutch rebels and Anabaptists...)'.¹²⁴

Gathered churches also multiplied once the revolution broke out. In 1640-1642 separatist communities could be found led by Henry Jessey in the Tower Liberty, Thomas Lambe in Whitechapel, John Spilsbury in Ratcliffe, Stepney, Praise God Barebone in Fleet Street, and by John Dart in his house in Southwark. There were two more in St Saviour's Southwark and Goat Alley off Whitecross Street.¹²⁵ When Spilsbury's congregation was arrested John Lilburne, his wife Elizabeth Lilburne and his sister, also Elizabeth who lived in Wapping, were among those

¹²⁰ *Persecutio Undecima* (London, 1648) p. 57. E470[7].

¹²¹ I Waters, *Henry Marten and the Long Parliament* (Chepstow, F G Comber, 1973) p. 36.

¹²² *Journal of the House of Commons*, Vol. 2, 1640-1643 (1802) pp. 54-55.

¹²³ H Overton, *An order made to a select committee chosen by the whole house of Commons to receive petitions touching ministers* (London, 1640).

¹²⁴ *Persecutio Undecima*, pp. 19-20, 54.

¹²⁵ *The Brothers of the Separation* (London, 1641), *Journal of the House of Lords*, Vol. 4, 1629-1642 (1767-1830) pp. 134-135, M Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints*, pp. 12-27. K Lindley, *Popular Politics and Religion in Civil War London*, pp. 79-83.

brought before the authorities.¹²⁶ In a long diatribe against Overton's Marprelate tracts, which also singles out Lilburne's work, Prynne complained that the gathered churches are 'sending out the Emissaries, Captaines and Souldiers everywhere to preach in corners and giving tickets of the time and place of their conventicles'.¹²⁷ The future Leveller leaders came of age politically in this environment. Indeed it is possible to see a direct line of descent from this type of organisation to the kind that was outlined by Lilburne and Wildman at the Well-yard meeting in Wapping three years later.

Walwyn was deeply engaged with the Independents and the gathered churches. Richard Overton was a Baptist, wavering between Goodwin's church and Lambe's in the 1643.¹²⁸ Lambe's Baptist church was a key centre of Leveller activity. John Lilburne was already a hero of the sectarian churches for his persecution by the Star Chamber. He was a member of Edmund Rosier's separatist church. And Lilburne said of William Kiffin, one of the key separatist preachers in London, he 'was once my servant' and that his dearest 'affections run out unto' him.¹²⁹ Samuel Highland was a Leveller in the 1640s and he had a congregation in Southwark in 1654 that supported the Fifth Monarchists. These may have been the semi-separatists recorded in Southwark in the 1640s. Certainly the Levellers had a base in the area. In August 1645 Hanserd Knollys, one of the most popular separatist preachers in London, offered these words to god in his church: 'Lord, bring thy servant Lilburne out of prison, and honour him, Lord, for he hath honoured you'. Lilburne's friends Katherine Chidley and her son Samuel, the future Leveller treasurer, ran their own separatist congregation in the Coleman Street area. The Leveller printer William Larner was a separatist.¹³⁰ Edward Vallance makes a strong case for oath taking and covenants as an informing model for the Levellers' *Agreements of the People*.

¹²⁶ S Wright, *The Early English Baptists 1603-1649* (Woodbridge, Boydell, 2006) p. 92 and p. 93 n. 65.

¹²⁷ W Prynne, *A Fresh Discovery...* (London, 1645) pp. 13-14.

¹²⁸ 'Index of Notable Baptists before 1850', *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*, Vol. II, (London, Baptist Union, 1920-21) p. 223. D A Kirby, 'The Parish of St. Stephen's', p. 102.

¹²⁹ J Lilburne, *The Legall Fundamental Liberties* (London, 1649) p. 19. E560[14]. See also T Edwards, *Gangraena*, pt I (London, 1646) p. 55. S Wright, *The Early English Baptists*, pp. 231-235.

¹³⁰ M Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints*, pp. 67, 147. A Johns, 'Coleman Street', in *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (March 2008), p. 44.

Some of these oaths and covenants were civil and secular in nature. But others were Church-learned methods of association.¹³¹

In 1646 Walwyn reported both the support for radical petitions among the gathered churches and the divisions among them. Walwyn cited support from ‘Anabaptist and Brownists congregations’ but opposition, on this occasion, from ‘Master Goodwin’s people, and some of the other Independent churches’.¹³² John Goodwin’s congregation had supported Lilburne during his imprisonment. In a letter to Goodwin at his house in Swan Alley, Coleman Street, Lilburne thanked them for ‘large kindnesses manifested unto me in this my present imprisonment in supplying my necessities’, but he also upbraided some members of the same congregation for blocking petitions by his supporters.¹³³ But as the radical Independents and the Lilburne group came together at the Windmill Tavern the future Levellers gathered wider support from the churches. Goodwin’s congregation also raised fifty shillings to print Walwyn’s *A Word In Season* and assisted in its distribution.¹³⁴ The print run was 10,000.¹³⁵ There are at least two editions of the pamphlet, one of which has a handwritten note to the effect that it was given out at Westminster Hall by Lilburne. Both were produced by Leveller printer Thomas Paine.¹³⁶ Nicholas Tue was a member of Thomas Lambe’s General Baptist church when he was arrested in his Coleman Street house for secret printing in early 1645.¹³⁷ Overton relied on members of his congregation to distribute pamphlets that were too hot for booksellers to handle. *The Last Warning to the Inhabitants of London*, the pamphlet that got Overton and Larner arrested and Larner jailed, was also distributed by Henry Overton of Goodwin’s church.

Gaining congregational affiliation for a political project was a contested process of course, and support for Walwyn and Lilburne was stronger among the mass of the congregation than it was

¹³¹ E Vallance, ‘Oaths, Covenants, Associations and the Origins of the *Agreements of the People*: The Road to and From Putney’ in P Baker and E Vernon (eds.), *The Agreements of the People, The Levellers and the Constitutional Crisis of the English Revolution*, pp. 28-49

¹³² *Walwyns Just Defence* in W Haller and G Davies, *The Leveller Tracts*, p. 352.

¹³³ J Lilburne, *Jonah’s Cry* (London, 1647) pp. 5-6. E400[5].

¹³⁴ *Walwyns Just Defence* in W Haller and G Davies, *The Leveller Tracts*, p. 393.

¹³⁵ M Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints*, p230 n. 22.

¹³⁶ W Walwyn, *A Word in Season* (London, 1646). E1184[3] is the edition containing the reference to Lilburne.

¹³⁷ HLMP, HL/PO/JO/10/1/180. f. 144, 146.

among the preachers. Walwyn managed to whip up enough opposition among worshippers to block a committee of investigation that Independent supporter John Price wanted to set up to examine him. But, as we have seen, on an earlier occasion it was the Independents who managed to block a Walwyn supported petition. Then, by March 1647, Walwyn had the upper hand again and managed to determine the content of a petition that was circulated to congregations for signature. An informer, a Mr Boys, at Thomas Lambe's General Baptist congregation on 14 March reported that a person at the front of the meeting read out the petition while Lambe corrected him. Members of the church then gave their subscriptions. Boys reported that between 100 and 120 put their names to it.¹³⁸ Lambe was brought before a Commons committee. He was supported by, among others, Nicholas Tue and Major Tulidah, Lilburne's associate. Lambe and Tue's Baptist associations in Whitechapel ran back to the early 1640s.¹³⁹ This was the start of a series of petitions and mobilisations in their support at Westminster in which separatists and General Baptists were mobilised in support of a Leveller inspired campaign.¹⁴⁰ Popular itinerant preacher Samuel Oates, another associate of Lambe, distributed the *Agreement of the People* through a network of agents in Rutland, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire.¹⁴¹ Lambe was also involved in distributing the *Agreement of the People* and, in Murray Tolmie's judgement, his activity was so extensive that it was 'scarcely less important' than Lilburne's work.¹⁴²

Some continuity exists between the gathered churches as an early incubator of Levellerism and the army as a later incubator. William Allen the agitator was a Southwark feltmaker and a Particular Baptist serving first in Holles's regiment and later in Skippon's. He was captured once and wounded twice. He was, with Sexby and Thomas Shepard, questioned by the Commons for

¹³⁸ *Journal of the House of Commons*, Vol. 5, 1646-1648 (1802), p112. M Tolmie, 'Thomas Lambe, Soapboiler, and Thomas Lambe, Merchant, General Baptists', pp. 7-9.

¹³⁹ K Lindley, 'Whitechapel Independents and the English Revolution', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Mar., 1998), p. 284. Tue had been arrested in 1643 for separatist activity, see A Hughes, *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford, OUP, 2004) p. 147.

¹⁴⁰ *Walwyns Just Defence* in W Haller and G Davies, *The Leveller Tracts*, pp. 355-356.

¹⁴¹ *The humble Petition of sundry of ye Ministers of ye Countie of Rutland & ye Parts adiacent* in A Betteridge, 'Early Baptists in Leicestershire and Rutland, I, Original Documents: Samuel Oates in Rutland, 1647-1648', *Baptist Quarterly*, 25.5, (Jan., 1973) p. 207.

¹⁴² M Tolmie, 'Thomas Lambe, Soapboiler, and Thomas Lambe, Merchant, General Baptists', p6. Thomas Lambe, ODNB.

his actions as an agitator.¹⁴³ His fellow agitator Edmund Chillenden was also from a separatist church, and became a Baptist. Robert Lockyer may well have been a Baptist. Henry Denne was a Leveller and a Baptist. Thomas Lambe was in Devizes, Wiltshire, in September 1646 with Leveller Jerimiah Ives meeting with radicalised soldiers. And it was alleged that Lambe had a hand in producing the papers worn in the soldiers' hats at the Ware Mutiny. In a certain sense the army made preaching to 'gathered churches' a necessity as well as the choice for many, though it also meant that formal separation was not an option since military discipline held all soldiers in one unit. Stephen Wright notes, the need for army unity 'worked against...gathered churches in the Army'.¹⁴⁴ This may, paradoxically, have enlarged the audience for separatist preachers since their listeners would be a cross section of soldiers not a self-selecting gathered church. Anne Laurence notes 'the most interesting series of chaplains are those which served Whalley: Richard Baxter, Henry Steevens, Hanserd Knollys, and Jeremiah Ives. Each new appointment was progressively more radical'.¹⁴⁵ Ives was an associate of Henry Denne and Leveller printer Henry Hills, as well as Thomas Lambe. In 1647 he was imprisoned with William Larner in the Gatehouse, and at the same time as Thomas Prince and Samuel Chidley, for defending the *Agreement of the People*.¹⁴⁶ Army chaplain Edward Harrison was also a Leveller.

The questions of political freedom and religious freedom were of course intertwined. Richard Baxter found many in Whalley's regiment arguing 'sometimes for state-democracy, sometimes for church-democracy'.¹⁴⁷ But to be in the Parliamentary army was a radicalising experience for many in and of itself. And the crisis that began with Presbyterian attempts to either disband the army without arrears and indemnity or send regiments to Ireland had its own dynamic which was distinct from the religious background of the radicals involved. Anne Laurence argues that 'the evidence of the chaplains hardly supports' Murray Tolmie's 'contention that the soldiery turned to the to the saints for a lead when "when faced with the ominous approach of an

¹⁴³ 'William Allen, Cromwellian Agitator and 'Fanatic' in *Baptist Quarterly* 19.7 (July, 1962) pp. 292-308.

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Lambe, ODNB; S Wright, *The Early English Baptists*, pp. 191-194.

¹⁴⁵ A Laurence, *Parliamentary Army Chaplains: 1642-1651*, p. 52.

¹⁴⁶ *A Bloody Independent Plot Discovered* (1647). E419[2]. *To the Supream Authority of England, the Commons in Parliament Assembled...* (London, 1647). M Tolmie, 'Thomas Lambe, Soapboiler, and Thomas Lambe, Merchant, General Baptists', p. 8.

¹⁴⁷ A Southern, *Forlorn Hope Soldier radicals of the Seventeenth Century* (Lewes, The Book Guild, 2001) pp. 73-77.

intolerant Presbyterian settlement” in the summer of 1647...It seems more likely that political allegiances and matters to do with the future of the army were more significant than religious preferences in deciding the fates of officers and chaplains in 1647.¹⁴⁸ Stephen Wright makes the point that Particular Baptists were more likely to be socially conservative than General Baptists but concludes that in the civilian conflicts between the Baptists and the Levellers ‘politics came first’.¹⁴⁹

There is one impact of the Independent and gathered churches on the future Levellers that is perhaps too little commented on~their role as a school of autonomous, collective organisation. The churches were a voluntary association in which congregations met to pursue religious aims outside the established framework. This in itself required self-organisation, often of an oppositional nature. Spaces to meet had to be located, congregations gathered, money had to be raised. In some churches ‘scruplers’ were encouraged to question the preacher, just as they were later to do in Leveller meetings. Lay members might be encouraged to speak and preach, again developing leadership capacities and independence of mind. Notes might be taken in shorthand, a technique later used, for instance, to record *The Triall of Lieut. Collonell John Lilburne* which was described on its front cover ‘as being exactly pen’d and taken in short hand’.¹⁵⁰ Reading and study of Biblical texts was encouraged, an enthusiasm that translated into the study and discussion of political pamphlets and broadsheets.

Conclusion

What emerges from this overview is a sense of the dense fabric of political opposition in the early days of the revolution, and in some cases from before that, from which the Levellers emerged as an organised current. Underground activity in churches and taverns, combined with the secret printing and petitioning activity analysed in other chapters, provided a schooling in organised politics which would feed into the foundations of the Leveller movement. The point where meetings in churches and taverns spills over into mass street demonstrations is possibly a

¹⁴⁸ A Laurence, *Parliamentary Army Chaplains: 1642 – 1651*, pp. 52-55.

¹⁴⁹ S Wright, *The Early English Baptists*, p. 196.

¹⁵⁰ *The Triall of Lieut. Collonell John Lilburne* (London, Henry Hills, 1649). E584[9].

decisive moment of transition. This is the point where clandestine or semi-clandestine activity becomes irrefutably public opposition to established authority. Later mutinies in the army were to provide another moment of open defiance to the established order. The Levellers became a unique current within the English Revolution by being able to maintain a mass, public presence through petitioning, printing and street demonstrations. Such work required collective organisation, action and leadership.

The trust essential to such leadership could only be established over time in joint activity. To an important degree the Levellers acquired this ability through a concentrated course of oppositional activity on the streets, in taverns and churches. As John Lilburne, Richard Overton, William Walwyn, Samuel Chidley, Thomas Lambe and others moved in the same circles, met and co-operated they came to form the core of an identifiable current with its own profile. This led both to a distinct series of ideological and political positions about the course of the revolution and the creation of an organised movement capable of conducting political campaigns and seeking alliances with other radical forces. This was the Levellers' singular contribution to the revolution.

Chapter 3

The Levellers and print

One functioning definition of a political organisation is that it comprises a group of people with shared objectives who co-operate in order to propagate their views and organise themselves to further agreed political aims.¹ In any age such activity is, in part, shaped by the means of communication available. When John Lilburne and his supporters began to co-operate politically printing was less than 200 years old. On the long view, if not by modern standards, it was a relatively new technology. The ability to use this technology for oppositional purposes was more recent still. The opportunity to use it on a mass scale was created for the first time in the Reformation and was almost unknown in England.

Print, and the ability to use it on a mass scale, cannot be seen as the sole determinant creating Leveller organisation. The Puritan tradition stretching back to the Reformation, the practice of Bible study, the emergence of gathered Churches are at least an equally important factor. The political crisis that produced the breakdown of pre-publication censorship in 1640 obviously created the conditions in which widespread oppositional activity, including printing, was possible.² But in the narrow focus of what made the Levellers a functioning political entity, printing and the use of printed material is central. No political organisation which mobilised beyond the political elite had done this before and no other organisation that did these things

¹ 'organisation: an organized group of people with a particular purpose, such as a business or government department', *Oxford Dictionaries online*.

<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/organization?q=organisation>

² On the distinction between different forms of censorship see A Hessayon, 'Incendiary texts: book burning in England, c.1640-c.1660', *Cromohs*, 12 (2007): 1-25, esp. point 14. www.cromohs.unifi.it/12_2007/hessayon_incendtexts.html

existed at the time. It is the Levellers' conscious and co-ordinated use of print for political purposes that is one of the things that marks them out as an effective organisation.

'The persecutors of the Saints': censorship and the Stationers' Company

One way of understanding what brought the future members of the Levellers together is to study the conditions under which they were attempting to articulate and propagate their ideas in print. These were conditions of illegality. Their activities carried the constant danger of arrest and imprisonment. Printing and distribution are a collective enterprise. But under such conditions the relationships that develop are also bound-up with political trust and intensified organisational interdependence.

The degree to which effective censorship had grown under Charles I is disputed by historians. Some, like D F McKenzie, argue that 'fear of the courts had virtually no impact on the economy of the book trade'.³ But a larger body of opinion holds that while the Caroline state cannot be seen as having totalitarian powers it was effective, if erratic, in enforcing censorship. Jason McElligott emphasises four points: first, 'There was an early-modern state and it could enforce its will upon the press when it chose to do so'. Second, 'censorship is a qualitative rather than a quantitative process', not reducible to statistics of licensing evasion or prosecutions. Third, 'censorship is also a pragmatic, contingent and grubby process dependent on the actions of individuals, which often defies idealized, abstract notions of how it should operate'. Finally, 'there were a variety of factors which might make censorship of a particular item more or less likely, but it was almost impossible for contemporaries to judge in advance how any or all of these might interact with each other'.⁴ C S Clegg makes the point that 'Press censorship was less a part of the routine machinery of an authoritarian state than an ad hoc response~albeit authoritarian~to particular texts that the state perceived to endanger the exercise of its

³ D F McKenzie, 'Printing and publishing 1557-1700: constraints on the London book trades' in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain* (Cambridge, CUP, 2002) p. 567.

⁴ G Kemp and J McElligott, 'General Introduction', in G Kemp, J McElligott, C S Clegg, M Goldie (eds.) *Censorship and the Press*, Vol. 1 (London, Pickering and Chatto, 2009) p. xxvii.

legitimate and necessary authority'.⁵ This is an important point since in respect of the Levellers the state often *did* see them as a challenge to its authority.

In 1637 the number of authorised printers in London was cut to twenty, by order of the Star Chamber. Imported books were controlled by the Bishops. No book in English could be legally printed abroad. Authors and printers of unlicensed books could be pilloried and whipped. The 'Puritan martyrs' Henry Burton, John Bastwick and William Prynne had their books burnt before them as they stood in the pillory before having their ears severed. Prynne had the initials 'SL', standing for 'seditious libel', branded on his face.⁶ The work of apprehending offenders was mainly in the hands of the body that had a monopoly of legal printing, the Stationers' Company. When John Lilburne was first arrested in December 1637 for distributing the pamphlets of the Puritan martyrs he was seized by members of the Stationers' Company who cried that 'they had taken one of the most notorious dispensers of scandalous books that was in the kingdome'.⁷ Lilburne was, famously then and ever since, whipped while tied to the back of cart and dragged from the Fleet prison to Westminster where he was put in the pillory. To print domestic news was an offence. In 1639 Richard Overton had the speaker in *Vox Borealis* say that the 'Search at London was hotter then the Presse at Paris' and so though 'I had once a good store of newsbooks in my pocket-book' he burnt them 'else the hangman had done it for me, and perhaps burned me with it'.⁸ Sir John Lambe, Archbishop Laud's enforcer, was certainly on the case. Evidence submitted to him and annotated in his own hand, and passed on the High Commission, records his efforts to suppress Separatist booksellers. His information identifies 'one Fisher, a barber in Old Bailey', Woulston, a scrivener in Chancery Lane, Edward Hill, a tailor and his wife, in Seething Lane, Stephen Proudlove of Bishopsgate 'he travels up and down to fairs', 'one Harford, a bookbinder in Paternoster Row' and 'Abbott, a bookseller in

⁵ G Kemp and J McElligott, 'General Introduction', p. xxvi.

⁶ D Cressy, *England on Edge, Crisis and Revolution 1640-1642* (Oxford, OUP, 2006) pp. 281-284. C Hill, 'Censorship and English Literature' in *Writing and Revolution in 17th Century England* (Brighton, Harvester, 1985) p. 37.

⁷ J Lilburne, *The Christian Man's Triall* (London, 1641) p1. E181[7].

⁸ *Vox Borealis*, (1641). E177[5]. See C Hill, 'Censorship and English Literature', p. 39 for the date of writing. In the same pamphlet Overton also complains about censorship in the theatre. See M Heinemann, 'Popular Drama and Leveller Style' in M Cornforth (ed.), *Rebels and Their Causes~Essays in Honour of A L Morton* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1978) p.76.

Whitechapel'. One of these, 'Callo, a perfumer in Cloth Fair, near Smithfield, and his wife, an Antinomian' had already been caught by an agent of the High Commission in the company of Sir Henry Marten, father of the Leveller ally Henry Marten.⁹

Censorship and the ability to enforce it received a huge blow in the opening months of the Long Parliament, even before the courts of Star Chamber and High Commission were abolished in 1641. Printed titles of all kinds rose from 600-700 a year in the 1630s, to 900 in 1640, to more than 2,000 in 1641, and over 3,500 in 1642. The number of newspapers alone grew from three in 1641, to 59 in 1642, to 70 in 1648. The number of print shops rose from twenty-four, containing fifty presses in 1640, to more than forty shops with some seventy presses in 1649. Christopher Hill's assessment meets with support from David Como's recent study: 'the traditional system of press licensing, overseen by the episcopal authorities and the privy council and managed through the Stationers' Company, effectively crumbled, opening space for a freewheeling, and to a certain extent, unregulated market of print'.¹⁰ But both Como and David Cressy make an important point which Hill did not stress. In Como's words: 'Yet as the political situation became ever more contentious...both Parliament and the king made repeated attempts, working in tandem with the stationers, to stem the tide of unlicensed pamphlets now cascading from London's presses'.¹¹ From this moment on there were repeated attempts to reimpose censorship and a running battle between the Stationers' Company and other authorities and the secret presses. Ariel Hessayon notes that Leveller works were among those burnt by the authorities and that between 1640 and 1660 Lilburne had more of his works consigned to the flames than any other author. Despite erratic state policy and internal company divisions between 1644 and 1649 the Stationers Company did hunt down the presses of

⁹ TNA:PRO, 'Information furnished to Dr. John Lambe, stating the doctrines held by and names of the followers of several Separatist sects...', SP 16/250 f.126.

¹⁰ A Hessayon, 'Incendiary texts: book burning in England, c.1640-c.1660', http://www.cromohs.unifi.it/12_2007/hessayon_incendtexts.html, paras. 10, 11, 12. C Nelson and M Seccombe, 'The creation of the periodical press 1620-1695' in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, especially the graph on p. 785. D Cressy, *England on Edge*, p. 292. C Hill, 'Censorship and English Literature', p. 39.

¹¹ D Como, 'Print, Censorship, and Ideological Escalation in the English Civil War', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (October 2012), pp. 822-823. D Cressy, *England on Edge*, pp. 303-309. See also J Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers, Propaganda During the English Civil Wars and Interregnum* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004) p. 137.

Nicholas Tue, William Larnier, and Richard Overton. Henry Hills had to vow not to produce scandalous material.¹²

Almost as soon as censorship broke down there were calls for it to be restored and repeated attempts by the authorities to do so from 1641, in part stimulated by the Stationers' Company.¹³ Something of the atmosphere of this conflict can be gained from *The Humble Remonstrance of the Company of Stationers* issued in April 1643 requesting greater powers from the government.¹⁴ This prolonged defence of the Stationers monopoly is justified by the argument that 'commonly where Printing droops, and Printers grow poor by neglect of Government, there errors and heresies abound'. The 'late decay of the Stationers' is blamed on the 'want of Politick regulation' and this has 'emboldened Printers to run into enormous disorders' since the abolition of the Star Chamber and High Commission. New regulation is needed because, say the Stationers, 'within these last four yeers, the affairs of the Presse have grown very scandalous and enormous, and all redresse is almost impossible, if power be not given to reduce the Presses...'.¹⁵

The work of reducing the number of presses and apprentices is all the more important, according to the Stationers, because 'the same disorder which undoes the Stationers...causes also Strangers, as Drapers, Carmen, and others to break in upon them, and set up Presses in divers obscure corners of the City, and Suburbs; so that not onely the ruine of the Company is the more hastened by it, but also the mischief, which the state suffers by irregularity of all is the less remediable...Where Delinquents grow too numerous, they grow out of the Eye of government'.¹⁶ Indeed the entire Civil War had been fuelled by uncontrolled printing which 'by deceiving the multitude' has 'brought into both Church and State...mischiefs and miseries'.¹⁷ If

¹² A Hessayon, 'Incendiary texts: book burning in England, c.1640-c.1660', points, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20.

¹³ D Cressy, *England on Edge*, p. 303.

¹⁴ *The Humble Remonstrance of the Company of Stationers* (London, 1643). E247[23].

¹⁵ *The Humble Remonstrance of the Company of Stationers*, pp1-2. Pagination is irregular and so I give them as they appear or as they can be counted from those pages that are numbered.

¹⁶ *The Humble Remonstrance of the Company of Stationers*, p3.

¹⁷ *The Humble Remonstrance of the Company of Stationers*, p6.

only the government would give the Stationers the power ‘all odious opprobrious Pamphlets of the incendiaries, Printed and invented in London...would be quashed’.¹⁸

Two months later, on 14th June 1643, the government did indeed grant the Stationers more power. But the Stationers did not manage to ‘quash’ the printing of odious pamphlets. This was not for the want of trying. The ‘Ordinance for correcting and regulating the Abuses of the Press’ was Draconian in intent. It echoed the Stationers’ *Remonstrance* in denouncing the setting up of ‘sundry private Printing Presses in Corners, and to print, vend, publish, and disperse, Books, Pamphlets, and Papers, in such Multitudes, that no Industry could be sufficient to discover, or bring to Punishment, all the several abounding Delinquents’. It sought to reimpose licensed printing under the control of the Stationers’ Company. It gave power to the Committee of the House of Commons for Examinations to search ‘for all unlicensed Printing Presses, and all Presses any Way employed in the Printing of scandalous or unlicensed Papers, Pamphlets, Books, or any Copies of Books’. They were empowered to seize presses and take them to ‘the Common Hall of the said Company, there to be defaced and made unserviceable’.¹⁹

But at the end of the following year, December 1644, as divisions within the Parliamentary camp widened, the Stationers were still having trouble tracking down the printers of an attack on the Earl of Manchester and the Earl of Essex. The Stationers’ Company excused themselves to the House by saying that the typeface used was a common one and ‘further complained of the frequent Printing of scandalous Books by divers, as Hezechia Woodward and Jo. Milton’.²⁰ As we shall see, both the attack on the Earls of Essex and Manchester and Milton’s work had connections to Leveller presses. Another 18 months later, in June 1646, Stationers’ agent Joseph Huns Scot, in the course of tracking down John Lilburne and William Larner, was still complaining that ‘the Companie of Stationers are called Theeves, Robbers, setting-doggs, the Bishops old Rogues, and the persecutors of the Saints, with other divers base names, and in the

¹⁸ *The Humble Remonstrance of the Company of Stationers*, pp3-4.

¹⁹ *Journal of the House of Lords*, Vol. 6, 1643, pp. 95-97. See also D Como, ‘Print, Censorship, and Ideological Escalation in the English Civil War’, pp. 823-825.

²⁰ *Journal of the House of Lords*, Vol. 7, 28 December 1644, pp. 116-117.

open streets reviled...'.²¹ But if the job of Stationers' agent was not a happy one it was still more dangerous to be operating an underground press.

Print and the origins of the Levellers

It is possible to describe a number of circles within which the future leaders of the Levellers moved and within which they made contact with one another. Most obviously these include the gathered churches and the apprentice networks of the City of London. But it was printing that brought John Lilburne and his supporters together in closer and specifically organised relationships long before they became known as Levellers. These relationships were, at first, a current within the wider stream of Independency. But as events created new political conditions this current became more distinct politically and organisationally until it became so recognisable that its opponents gave it a name.

William Larner, one of the mainstays of Leveller printing, had printed Lilburne's *The Christian Man's Triall* in 1641 and sold it at his shop 'at the Signe of the Golden Anchor' near Saint Pauls.²² At the same time Larner was already in contact with future Levellers Richard Overton and Thomas Prince and other radical figures.²³ Larner's early printing also included a work by Katherine Chidley, herself a future Leveller and the mother of Leveller treasurer Samuel Chidley.²⁴ Samuel Chidley knew Lilburne for 'long time, even from the time of his sufferings by the bloody Bishops' in the 1630s.²⁵ Another future Leveller printer, Thomas Paine, printed the first edition of John Milton's *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* in 1643.²⁶ The second edition, to which Milton put his name, was printed by Gregory Dexter, who had already produced a pamphlet for Larner in 1641. This was a work by Thomas Devenish, John Lilburne's landlord

²¹ *The humble petition of Joseph Hunscoth Stationer...*, p. 3. E340[15].

²² J Lilburne, *The Christian Man's Triall* (London, 1641). E181[7]. In January 1641 Larner also had printed the remarkable 'To the Honourable The House of Commons Assembled in Parliament...', 669 f.4[54]. For a further discussion of this petition see 'The Levellers and petitioning' chapter of this thesis.

²³ K Lindley, *Popular Politics and Religion in Civil War London* (Aldershot, Scolar, 1997) pp. 393-394.

²⁴ K Chidley, *The Justification of the Independent Churches* was printed by William Larner in 1641. See also P R S Baker, 'William Larner', ODNB.

²⁵ S Chidley, *The Dissembling Scot* (London, 1652) p. 4. E652[13]. I J Gentles, 'Samuel Chidley', ODNB.

²⁶ D Como, 'Print, Censorship, and Ideological Escalation in the English Civil War', p. 831.

and a member of Goodwin's church.²⁷ Larnar was already known to William Walwyn and, as we shall see, printed his work. Baptist Henry Hills would also print Walwyn's pamphlets later in the 1640s. But it was John Lilburne who originally arranged his apprenticeship in the printing trade in 1642, drawing him away from his previous calling as a postilion for Thomas Harrison. Hills was at first apprenticed to Thomas Paine. Harrison later made Hills printer to the Army.²⁸ And Hills' co-printer at the Army press organised by Edward Sexby was John Harris who edited the most radical of the Leveller newsheets, *Mercurius Militaris*, in 1648.²⁹ Hills was an associate, like Lilburne, of William Kiffin and was later attacked as a 'fanatic' alongside Levellers Richard Overton and Jeremy Ives.³⁰

Overton was, as well as much else and alongside Larnar, the main printer in the Leveller cause. Exemplary research by David Como has demonstrated how early Overton was engaged in underground printing and his connections with other future Levellers.³¹ Como's close analysis of the type used in various radical pamphlets at the start of the 1640s managed to significantly revise the history of the 'Cloppenburg Press'. This secret press producing unlicensed and therefore illegal material was first thought to have been based in the Netherlands. Como has shown that it was in fact based in London and that Richard Overton, in partnership with Peter Cole, was its likely owner.

In 1640 a series of pamphlets began to roll from the Cloppenburg Press. Some were the official propaganda of the Scottish Covenanters, some were books of well-known English 'puritan

²⁷ David Como's careful work has revealed Dexter as the printer of the second edition Milton's divorce tract. Como notes Dexter's connections with Thomas Paine and the circles within which William Walwyn was moving but does not mention this early connection with Larnar. Yet it maybe this connection which explains why Milton moved from Paine to Dexter for the second printing of the divorce pamphlet. See D Como, 'Print, Censorship, and Ideological Escalation in the English Civil War', pp. 829-836. The 1641 pamphlet by Dexter and his business partner Richard Oulton that they printed 'for William Larnar' is T Devenish, *Certraine Observations on Concerning the Duty of Love...* E142[21]. D A Kirby, 'The Parish of St. Stephen's,' pp. 118-119.

²⁸ *A view of part of the many Traiterous, Disloyal and Turn-about Actions of H H Senior* (1684). Wing (CD-Rom) V359. I Gadd, ODNB. R L Greaves and R Zaller, *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century*, Vol. II, (Brighton, Harvester, 1984) pp. 91-92. 'Henry Hills, Official Printer', *Baptist Quarterly* 6.5 (January, 1932) pp. 215-216.

²⁹ See M Mendle, 'Putney's pronouns: identity and indemnity in the great debate' in M Mendle (ed), *The Putney Debates of 1647* (Cambridge, CUP, 2001) pp. 126-133.

³⁰ *A view of part of the many Traiterous, Disloyal and Turn-about Actions of H H Senior* (1684). Wing (CD-Rom) V359. 'Henry Hills, Official Printer', *Baptist Quarterly*, p. 216.

³¹ D Como, 'Secret Printing, the Crisis of 1640 and the Origins of Civil War Radicalism', *Past and Present*, No.196 (August, 2007).

martyrs', some were by less well-known Puritan radicals. Among the material produced was *A Copy of a Letter Written by John Lilburne*. Another of the pamphlets was a reprint of one of the late 16th century Marprelate Tracts.³² Peter Cole was also the printer of the *Three Speeches delivered at a Common-hall* in 1643. At this mass meeting future Leveller ally Henry Marten, alongside the Earl of Manchester and John Pym, made a speech in favour of the Committee for a General Rising and for the more effective prosecution of the war.³³ In 1641 Richard Overton was already appropriating the Martin Marprelate persona, the pseudonym used for anti-episcopal tracts in the late 1580s, for his own use in the tract signed Margery Marprelate.³⁴ But more definite proof of Overton's involvement comes from the records of the Stationers' Company which were soon urged by the authorities to close down the press producing these pamphlets. The records of the Company show that they seized the press and that it was 'taken at Bell alley over against Finsbury'. Nearly two years later they returned it to Peter Cole and 'the owner thereof' Richard Overton.³⁵ Overton and Cole parted company at some point in 1644. But Cole was printing Henry Marten's *The Independency of England* in 1648.³⁶ Overton went on to use some of the printing material from the recovered Cloppenburg Press in future Leveller pamphlets, including *Every Man's Case* written in defence of, and possibly by, William Larner. The press that printed this pamphlet was seized by the Stationers from the Southwark lodgings of Richard Overton in 1646.³⁷

What is important here is not just the involvement and contact between the future Leveller leaders. Equally important is the level of political organisation that would have been necessary to sustain a secret press. Como notes 'someone had to secure the press and letter, a location (or locations) needed to be found, copyists, compositors and printers identified, editorial decisions made, material secured, and a distribution network established; moreover, it is difficult to imagine a complex operation of this nature existing without some collusion from sympathetic

³² D Como, 'Secret Printing...', p. 41-44.

³³ *Three Speeches delivered at a Common-hall* (London, August 1643). Marten's speech is on pp. 17-18.

³⁴ *Vox Borealis*, (1641). E177[5].

³⁵ D Como, 'Secret Printing...', p. 69.

³⁶ H Marten, *The Independency of England* (London, 1648). E422[16].

³⁷ D Como, 'Secret Printing...', pp. 74-75.

fellow-travellers, whose silence, if not participation, would have been necessary to protect the press'.³⁸ And Overton, Tue and Larner were all running such operations in the early 1640s.

These print operations seemed to have grown considerably in the mid-1640s, according to H R Plomer's path-breaking study.³⁹ In 1643 a group of Independents in which future Levellers Lilburne, Overton and Larner were prominent established an illegal press at the house of Nicholas Tue. Tue lived in Coleman Street in the City, the very epicentre of the gathered churches and political radicalism.⁴⁰ When this press was seized another was established at Larner's premises in Bishopsgate Street. This was moved to avoid capture in July 1645 to nearby Goodman's Fields in Aldgate.⁴¹ Joseph Hunscomb of the Stationers' Company led a raid on these premises at some point between October and December 1645. Hunscomb captured the press but the printers held the door against the raiding party until it was broken in and then managed to escape down a rope from an upper window. With remarkable persistence a new press and type were set up again in Larner's Bishopsgate headquarters, with Lilburne living close by. This press ran until it too was seized in July 1646. Not entirely surprisingly Hunscomb said he would like to see Larner 'whipt once a day, for six weeks... and then to be hanged'. In the same month Lilburne was imprisoned in the Tower.⁴²

The Hunscomb raid occurred at same time as two new pamphlets came from the secret presses. On October 10 and 11, 1645 *England's Birth-Right Justified*, written by Richard Overton and John Lilburne, and *England's Lamentable Slavery*, written by William Walwyn 'after discussions with his friend Lilburne', according to D M Wolfe, were published.⁴³ The Overton-Lilburne pamphlet is much longer and contains a number of additional letters and petitions that support its argument. Nevertheless there are some significant similarities in the arguments deployed in both publications. The general argument in both cases is that the supporters of the parliamentary

³⁸ D Como, 'Secret Printing...', p. 52.

³⁹ H R Plomer, 'Secret Printing During the Civil War', *Library*, Series 2, V, (1904).

⁴⁰ H R Plomer, 'Secret Printing During the Civil War', pp. 375-382.

⁴¹ Or so Larner's friends claimed *Every Mans Case* (London, 1646) p. 8. E337[5]. David Adams speculates that the Goodman's Fields press may actually have been operated at Dead Man's Place near the Southwark home of Richard Overton. See D R Adams, 'The Secret Publishing Career of Richard Overton the Leveller', 1644-46', *Library*, Series 7, Vol. 11, No.1 (March 2010), p. 46.

⁴² H R Plomer, 'Secret Printing During the Civil War', pp. 393-394.

⁴³ D M Wolfe, *Leveller Manifestoes of the Puritan Revolution* (New York, Frank Cass, 1967) pp. 5-6.

cause have undergone much hardship and deprivation during the war and are now disappointed by the slowness of parliament to meet their grievances. There are specific complaints in both pamphlets that parliament is not above the law and should be subordinate to the people who elected parliament. But the two pamphlets also contain information which is of greater interest in accessing the degree of organisational co-operation between the future leaders of the Levellers.

At the time the pamphlets were issued John Lilburne was being held in Newgate prison. *England's Birth-Right Justified* is, among other things, a protest at this imprisonment. Walwyn directly supports Lilburne's case in *England's Lamentable Slavery*. He echoes Overton and Lilburne's theme that there is little progress if the Star Chamber is abolished but the 'imprisoning of men' continues 'contrary to law, equitie, and justice'. In a direct reference to Lilburne's case he concludes 'All the Art and Sophisterie in the world, will not availe to perswade you, that you are not in New gate, much less that you are at libertie'. And Walwyn refers to Lilburne's imprisonment at the King's Oxford headquarters early in the Civil War and also mentions Leveller ally Henry Marten. He berates those that think that 'what the King could not doe to him (as one of Parliaments best friends) when he was close Prisoner there, the parliament themselves must endeavour to doe to him in his unjust prisonment here'.⁴⁴ Moreover in the postscript, 'The Printer to the Reader', Walwyn again urges support for Lilburne's cause. And in the final sentence of the pamphlet Walwyn 'desires thee to read' Overton and Lilburne's *England's Birth-Right Justified*. Here we see direct collaboration and mutual support between Overton, Lilburne, Walwyn and, possibly, Marten long before the Levellers were called such.⁴⁵

The press that produced *England's Birth-Right Justified* and the defences of Larner was captured on 11th August 1646 when Richard Overton was arrested in his bed during a dawn raid of his house in Southwark. The file of musketeers were led by Robert Eeles of the Stationers' Company, 'commonly known by the name of Robin the Divell' according to Overton. They

⁴⁴ W Walwyn, *England's Lamentable Slavery* (1645) pp6-7. E304[19].

⁴⁵ *England's Lamentable Slavery* (1645) p8. E304[19].

searched the house, seized the printing press and pamphlets, and took Overton to the House of Lords by boat for questioning.⁴⁶ Both Overton and his accusers, the Earls Essex and Hunsden, noted his collaboration with Lilburne. In addition, Overton also mentions William Larnier.⁴⁷

Samuel Chidley recalls being 'out of purse' through paying printers. And he records his and Lilburne's battles with one particular printer who insisted on 'foysting in his own tedious stuffe' and 'whimes of his owne braine' into the text. This 'mad stuffe' would make 'honest Liburne very much vexed...and he would put it out again'. Chidley recalls that, as treasurer, he would never pay out money 'contrary to the order of those who instructed me'. His whole account is permeated with a sense of organised politics. Even when he disagreed with the title of one Leveller petition, because it described the Commons as the 'Supream Authority' at a time when the Commons were acknowledging the King and the Lords, he still defended the petition to the Commons from 'the latter end of the title to the end of the petition'.⁴⁸

These accounts of the working of the secret presses are, as Como himself notes, a direct challenge to some conclusions of revisionist writing because they demonstrate that in London an organised and ideologically motivated group of activists were illegally seeking, sometimes alongside the Scots, sometimes alone, to promote parliamentary authority over Royal authoritarianism and the replacement of the Church of England with a regime of gathered voluntary Churches. Moreover they illustrate the early emergence of a proto-Leveller network, the continuity of personnel, tactics and political approach.⁴⁹ Much would change in the ensuing decade. The allies of 1640-41 would fall away and some, like Prynne and Bastwick, would become enemies. New allies from the gathered Churches and the Army would replace them. Ideology would be sharpened by further thought and by the impact of events. Organisation would become more extensive. But an irreducible core of the organisation from the early 1640s, much of it revolving around the production of printed material, would remain through the peak of Leveller influence late in the decade.

⁴⁶ R Overton, *A Defiance Against All Usurpations* (London, 1646) pp. 8-9. See also D R Adams, 'The Secret Publishing Career of Richard Overton the Leveller', 1644-46', p. 55.

⁴⁷ R Overton, *A Defiance Against All Usurpations* (London, 1646) pp. 17-19.

⁴⁸ S Chidley, *The Dissembling Scot* (London, 1652) pp. 7-8. E652[13].

⁴⁹ D Como, 'Secret Printing...', pp. 75, 81-82.

Spreading the word

The writers of pamphlets, their printers and booksellers are not easy to identify, but the wider networks of distribution are even more difficult to recreate. Yet, from the glimpses of them that we do catch, it can be seen that the networks of organisation that existed around the distribution of printed material were certainly far wider than those established around the actual printing of the material itself. Samuel Chidley, the Leveller treasurer who paid the printers, reckoned that ‘if a man print an Impression of fifteen hundred books, peradventure they be spread to 15000. persons, and leven them all’.⁵⁰

We know that some printed material was simply scattered in the streets. On the night of 8/9 December 1644, which was the day after the self-denying ordinance was proposed in the Commons, the sheet *Alas Pore Parliament how Art thou Betrai’d?*, printed by Overton, was scattered in the streets at night.⁵¹ Aimed at the Earls Manchester and Essex it complained that ‘We have brave Generalls who fight for the King...one of them hath wrought finely in the darke all this while like a Divell, but the other hath shew’d himselfe an open enemy’. And it concluded in hallmark Leveller style ‘Neither of them worke, but make worke; when they should doe, they undoe, and indeed to undoe is all the marke they aim at....no more Lords and yee love me, they smell o’ the Court’.⁵² Walwyn’s 1646 pamphlet *A Word In Season* appears in two editions printed by Leveller Thomas Paine. One conventionally tells us that it is to be sold by ‘Edward Blackmoore at his shop in Pauls Churchyard’.⁵³ The other contains the printed information that Thomas Paine dwells in ‘Red-Crosse Street, in Goldsmith’s Alley, over against the signe of the Sugar-loaf’ where, presumably, copies could be purchased. But this edition also contains Thomason’s handwritten annotation telling us that it was handed out by John Lilburne at Westminster Hall.⁵⁴ This fourteen page pamphlet was a rather more substantial product to be given away than the one page sheet *Alas Pore Parliament*. We may speculate that the one-page version of Larner’s *Every Man’s Case* was produced to be given away in this manner, rather than

⁵⁰ S Chidley, *The Dissembling Scot* (London, 1652) p. 9. E652[13].

⁵¹ D R Adams, ‘The Secret Publishing Career of Richard Overton the Leveller’, 1644-46’, p. 56.

⁵² *Alas Pore Parliament how Art thou Betrai’d?*, E21[9].

⁵³ *A Word In Season*. E337[25].

⁵⁴ *A Word In Season*. E1184[3].

having to give out the more costly eight page pamphlet version. The Royalist George Wharton said that the Levellers' newssheet *Mercurius Militaris* was 'scattered abroad'.⁵⁵

It was this kind of activity which landed Larner in trouble and so angered Joseph Huns Scot that he issued his petition. Huns Scot had been involved in the persecution of Larner and Lilburne, and before that of George Thomason. His petition provides valuable evidence of proto-Leveller organisation. Huns Scot claims to have got on to the trail of his quarry by cross-examining women he found selling seditious pamphlets in the street, including the daughter of a Mr Browne a bookseller. She told Huns Scot, before his identity as a Stationer was clear, that she had got the pamphlets from John Lilburne.⁵⁶ Women street-sellers of pamphlets were widespread. The Stationers' Company petition of 1643 complained of 'the shamefull custome of selling Pamphlets by Sempsters[seamtresses], &c. and dispersing them in the streets by Emissaries of such base condition'.⁵⁷ Broad sheets could be bought for a penny, an eight-page pamphlet for a penny or twopence, about the price of drink.⁵⁸

Huns Scot searched the Brownes' house and found a 'great store' of printed material. Huns Scot then went and searched Lilburne's chambers without success. He then returned to arrest Browne, but Browne gave the Constable the slip and left Huns Scot with only the daughter to send to prison. Mr Browne was later arrested but was acquitted. He told the hapless Huns Scot that if he ever came to search his house again he would 'knock out his braines'. Huns Scot then moved against Larner and his press at Goodmans Fields. Larner orchestrated a flurry of petitions from prison. Huns Scot recounts that he and the Warden for the Stationers' Company went to see Larner in prison and found him with 'divers papers of his own hand writing...which about a week after came forth in print, called, *A True Relation of all the Remarkable*

⁵⁵ G Wharton, *Mercurius Impartialis*, p. 2. E476[3].

⁵⁶ *The humble petition of Joseph Huns Scot Stationer...*, pp. 3-7. E340[15].

⁵⁷ *The Humble Remonstrance of the Company of Stationers*, p. 3.

⁵⁸ D Cressy, *England on Edge*, p. 300.

*Passages, and Illegal Proceedings of some Sathannical or Doeg-like Accusers of their Brethern Against William Larner, A Free-man of England.*⁵⁹

We have seen that Walwyn recommended his readers to purchase John Lilburne's *England's Birth-Right Justified*. So did the postscript to the pamphlet version of Larner's *Every Man's Case* and Overton's *An Alarum to the House Of Lords*. The postscript to *An Alarum*, which the Lords set up special committee to investigate, also urged the reading of the petition *A Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens*, Lilburne's *Just Man in Bonds*, *The Pearle in the Dunghill* and 'Larner's Bookes'.⁶⁰ Thomas Edwards was particularly alarmed that one of Overton's anti-Presbyterian pamphlets had proved so popular that it was turned into a two-part, printed ballad to be sung to the tune of 'the merry Souldier, or the joviall Tinker'.⁶¹

Pamphlets were sold in the bookshops and book stalls, the greatest concentration being around St Pauls. The most detailed picture of this trade in respect of Leveller pamphlets comes from the House of Lords examinations of Giles Calvert, Henry Cripps and William Larner concerning the sale of the pamphlet *The Last Warning to All the Inhabitants of London*, which the Lords thought printed by Overton.⁶² Under examination by Thomas Atkins the Lord Mayor it emerged that Overton had sold one hundred copies of this pamphlet to both Giles Calvert and to Henry Cripps at his shop in Popes Head Alley. Larner refused to say where he got his copies when they were seized at his 'dwelling at The Blackimore, in Bishopsgate Streete'. A third party present at the examination did however volunteer that more copies of *The Last Warning* had been 'seized upon in the Shop of one Woodnett, living in Cornhill; who confessed that he received them from the said William Lerner'.⁶³ That was enough to see Larner imprisoned. Overton printed the tracts in his defence.

⁵⁹ *The humble petition of Joseph Hunscoth Stationer...*, pp 3-7. On Hunscoth's dealings with Thomason see G K Fortescue, Preface, *British Museum Catalogue of Thomason Tracts 1640-1652*, Vol. I, p. iv.

⁶⁰ *Every Man's Case*, p. 8. E337[5]. The single sheet version of *Every Man's Case* does not include the postscript. *An Alarum to the House Of Lords*, p11. E346[8]. HLMP, HL/PO/JO/10/1/211. f. 79.

⁶¹ T Edwards, *Gangraena*, pt. II (London, 1646) pp. 155-156. Edwards was so outraged that the ballad features again in *Gangraena*, pt. III, p. 230.

⁶² *Journal of the House of Lords*, Vol. 8, 1645-1647, pp. 256-258.

⁶³ *Journal of the House of Lords*, Vol. 8, 1645-1647, pp. 244-245.

William Prynne certainly thought Lilburne was in control of an organised network that distributed pamphlet material. Prynne had now turned gamekeeper and was legal counsel for the Stationers' Company as well as a leading Presbyterian controversialist.⁶⁴ In the preface to his 1645 riposte to Lilburne, *The Lyar Confounded*, Prynne describes 'notorious lyes' against Parliament spread by Lilburne 'and his confederates' in 'seditious Printed Papers' which are 'scattered abroad by one Leaner and others, among Kentish Malignants and Male-contents in other parts.'⁶⁵ Prynne wrongly attributes a number of Overton's pamphlets to Lilburne in the course of his tirade since they have the 'self same Letter and Presse'. It is perhaps indicative of the close relationship among the core group of future Levellers that Prynne thought he detected in Overton's work Lilburne's 'very Expressions and Phrases'. Prynne goes on to describe how Lilburne 'after his old manner' had his *Copy of a Letter* 'sent to a private Unlicensed Presse (alwaies ready at his command) where being speedily Printed, he dispersed the printed Copies thereof every where by his Agents among his Friends, and Confederates, who vented them underhand for money'.⁶⁶ Even the early Cloppenburg pamphlets were found as far afield as Cambridge, Hertfordshire, Sussex and Northamptonshire.⁶⁷

John Bastwick, like Prynne a former ally of Lilburne, also provides an insight into the political network around Lilburne at this time. In *A Just Defence of John Bastwick* from August 1645 we see Lilburne as part of the Independent party, but with a distinct organised group of supporters.⁶⁸ Bastwick's pamphlet is a reply to a printed letter of Lilburne's attacking the Presbyterians. Bastwick says that Lilburne's 'Letter is now as publike as weekly newes, and in every bodyes hands'. It is the 'ordinary practice' of Lilburne 'and those in his society', says Bastwick, 'to abuse such in tongue and in print' in this and 'his many other Pamphlets.' Lilburne's doctrines have been causing divisions as far afield as Boston and 'through Lincolnshire'.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ See D Como, 'Print, Censorship, and Ideological Escalation in the English Civil War', p. 826 n. 23.

⁶⁵ W Prynne, *The Lyar Confounded*. E267[1].

⁶⁶ W Prynne, *the Lyar Confounded*, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁷ D Como, 'Secret Printing...' p. 56.

⁶⁸ J Bastwick, *A Just Defence of John Bastwick* (London, 1645). E265[7].

⁶⁹ J Bastwick, *A Just Defence...*, p. 32. Pagination is erratic so that pp. 32-33 come before a sheet of two pages numbered 20 and 17.

Bastwick clearly sees Lilburne as leader of a group of ‘Rabble rout, tagragge and bobtaile’ that he encountered at the Committee of Examinations. Walwyn (or ‘Worly’ as Bastwick has it) is specifically referred to in this context as the only gentleman among Lilburne’s followers.

Bastwick sees this as a self-sustaining faction.⁷⁰ Lilburne ‘is but the mouth, and the foreman of that Tribe, and what he did, they all owne’. Moreover, Bastwick directly refers to organised efforts by Lilburne’s supporters to distribute printed material ‘through the kingdome, that so they may with more facility spread abroad and publish the sentence given by the Lieutenant against the whole Parliament...’.⁷¹ Bastwick sees Lilburne as the ‘champion’ of the Independents who are ‘applauding all his actions’. Lilburne he says is ‘upheld by that party’.

Thus far Bastwick portrays Lilburne and his supporters as a group within the Independents as, for instance, Jason Peacey has argued.⁷² But Bastwick also clearly sees from the behaviour of Lilburne’s supporters at the Committee for Examinations that they have a distinctive set of ideas and allegiances against which he warns the Independents. Lilburne’s supporters, says Bastwick,

...gave laws to the Committee, and would not be examined but upon their own tearmes, crying out of injustice, and threatening that they would bring up the whole City, and a thousand such insolencies they used there for many dayes together; all of which doe manifest, that if in time their party grow a little stronger, they will give laws to Parliament...or else they will take authority into their own hands; for Lieutnant-Colonell John Lilburne hath plainly taught his Disciples, that the power that now resides in Parliament, is inherent in the people...and affirmes, that the power is the people’s birth-right.⁷³

‘No men, not even the Independents themselves’, says Bastwick, should be ‘abetting with Lieutnant-Colonell Lilburne’. For once the power of Parliament is destroyed ‘you shall shortly

⁷⁰ J Bastwick, *A Just Defence...*, pp. 16-17.

⁷¹ J Bastwick, *A Just Defence...*, p. 20.

⁷² J T Peacey, ‘John Lilburne and the Long Parliament’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Sept., 2000), pp. 625-645.

⁷³ J Bastwick, *A Just Defence...*, pp. 21-22.

see...every servant become a Master and a Mistris, and cast off the yoke of obedience to their Superiours, whether Parents, Masters or Governours...for I well perceive the poore people are all deluded by his false information'.⁷⁴ The following year, 1646, we can see the future Levellers emerging as an identifiable group in Thomas Edwards' *Gangraena*.

The three parts of *Gangraena* appeared in February, May and December of 1646. Lilburne and his pamphleteering remains a constant target throughout. But the future Levellers emerge as a more central concern in part three of *Gangraena*. In the index which precedes part three, 'A Relation of the names and Speeches, and doings of the principall Independents and Sectaries', over 70 individuals are named. Only Hugh Peter and John Goodwin have more citations than Lilburne and Overton. Other future Levellers mentioned include Thomas Lambe, Henry Denne, Katherine Chidley and Clement Wrighter.⁷⁵ William Walwyn was the object of Edwards' ire in all three parts of *Gangraena*. And since Walwyn had defended Lilburne from the attacks on him in part one, the two are specifically bracketed together as organised political allies in part two.⁷⁶ Larner does not appear in the index but he is attacked in the text of part three, his name linked to Overton and Lilburne.⁷⁷ In part one Edwards does not mention Overton and attributes his pamphlets to Lilburne.⁷⁸ But by part three Overton is specially attacked in his own right and in association with Lilburne. Ann Hughes suggests this treatment by Edwards follows from the rise in Overton's prominence over the course of 1646. She notes that 'Overton and Lilburne are always coupled together by Edwards'.⁷⁹ So too was Larner. All three had been jailed in the course of the year. Lilburne's supporters were clearly an identifiable and distinct trend within Independancy. In Bastwick and Edwards work we can clearly see the anti-Leveller rhetoric in formation, rhetoric that would become more common when the Levellers were so named.

⁷⁴ J Bastwick, *A Just Defence...*, p. 33.

⁷⁵ T Edwards, *Gangraena*, pt. III (London, 1646). 'A Relation...' is unpaginated but is placed immediately before the main text.

⁷⁶ T Edwards, *Gangraena*, pt. II, p. 29.

⁷⁷ T Edwards, *Gangraena*, pt. III, pp. 155, 197.

⁷⁸ T Edwards, *Gangraena*, pt. I, p. 53 where the 'Arraignment of Persecution' and 'Martins Eccho' are said to be Lilburne's.

⁷⁹ A Hughes, *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford, OUP, 2004) p. 364.

The Army also provided a network of distribution. Of the original core of Levellers associated with printing it was not just Lilburne who served and who had contacts in the Army. William Larnar served in Lord Robartes regiment until ill health sent him home again. William Larnar's brother John, who was imprisoned rather than give evidence against him, 'for 3 yeares adventured his life as a Trooper'.⁸⁰ Thomas Prince, by trade a cheesemonger, was a wholesale supplier to the Army. Leveller ally Henry Marten raised troops for Parliament. Henry Hills, as we have seen, became an army printer following the soldiers with a portable press. John Harris, of whom more below, the editor of the Leveller paper *Mercurius Militaris*, was also an army printer. William Allen, like Lilburne, fought at Brentford in 1642 and ended up as an Agitator for Cromwell's Regiment by 1647. William Eyre, like Lilburne and Allen, fought at Brentford, became quartermaster of Cromwell's own troop in the Ironsides, was elected an Agitator and arrested for advocacy of the *Agreement of the People* at Ware, went on to fight in Henry Marten's cavalry regiment that so terrified the gentry of Berkshire in 1648, and was arrested again for mutiny at Burford.⁸¹ By this point of course the debate in the Army about a post-war political settlement had long since considerably augmented the Leveller network among the soldiers. In 1648 Lilburne could not only raise money to 'send their Agents abroad' to deliver petitions but could also rely on the fact that 'honest soldiers now at White Hall would save them something in scattering them up and down the Counties'.⁸² The Leveller press protested that it should not be 'a crime for one Souldier to give another any printed news or Petitions'.⁸³ More evidence of the scale of the Leveller distribution network comes from the order given by the Council of State to Seargent Edward Dendy on the 6th December 1649. Dendy was told to search for and seize all books about Lilburne's trial and specifically to 'search the warehouse at Porter's Quay' and two ships bound for Hull which might contain a sea chest and box full of Lilburne's pamphlets.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ HLMP, HL/PO/JO/10/1/206. f. 212. *The Out-cries of the Oppressed Commons*, p10-11. Wing L2150.

⁸¹ P H Hardacre, 'Eyre, William (fl. 1634-1675)', *ODNB*. See also P N Hardacre, 'William Allen, Cromwellian Agitator and "Fanatic"', *Baptist Quarterly*, 19.7, (July, 1962).

⁸² G Masterson, *A Declaration of Some Proceedings* (London, 1647) p. 17. E427[6].

⁸³ *Mercurius Militaris*, No. 1, 10 October 1648. E467[34].

⁸⁴ TNA: PRO, Warrants issued by the Council of State, 6th December 1649, SP 18/6 f.10, SP 18/6 f.41.

The Moderate

Before the Long Parliament newspapers were restricted to reporting foreign news and even these were banned by the Star Chamber in 1632. This order was revoked in 1638 when two booksellers, Nicholas Bourne and Nathaniel Butter, who had previously produced these ‘corantos’ were licensed to produce newsbooks once more. Perhaps a thousand or so such books were produced in the twenty-two years before 1642.⁸⁵ As censorship broke down the first eight page, weekly newsbook containing domestic stories appeared in November 1641. The snappily named *Heads of Severall Proceedings* was entirely a report of news from both Houses of Parliament.⁸⁶ But many others followed, improving, within the limits of the age, typography, design and content. Soon there were Royalist, Presbyterian and Independent titles to be bought.

Parliament, as we have seen, made one of its more determined efforts to check unlicensed printing in 1643. This had a rather different effect on those producing weekly publications than it did on printers of one-off pamphlets. It is a difficult task to produce an illegal pamphlet, but it is much more difficult to produce an illegal regular weekly newspaper. Most newsbooks registered their title to comply with the new rules. John Dillingham’s *The Parliamentary Scout* was the first to do so, but others soon followed. This may be an important part of the reason why the Levellers were relatively slow to produce a weekly newspaper. A precise account of the origins of that paper, *The Moderate*, tends to substantiate this point.

Many newspapers of all political hues were in circulation long before the Levellers had a weekly paper that reflected their views. And pamphlets and petitions by Lilburne, Overton, Larner and their associates had been pouring from the presses for years before *The Moderate* appeared.

Indeed it seems to have been a conflict over licencing that first allowed *The Moderate* to publish.

Licencing was a battleground throughout the revolution. In 1645 through 1646 the

Presbyterians seemed to have ‘a tyranny over the press’.⁸⁷ In the midst of the post-war battle for

⁸⁵ F Dahl, *A Bibliography of English Corantos 1620-1642* (London, Bibliographical Society, 1952) pp. 19, 22. C Nelson and M Seccombe, ‘The creation of the periodical press 1620-1695’ in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, pp. 538-541.

⁸⁶ J Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper, English Newsbooks 1641-1649* (Oxford, OUP, 1996) pp. 13, 20.

⁸⁷ J Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper*, p. 47.

supremacy between king, Presbyterians and Independents in March 1647 Parliament revoked their delegation of newsbook censorship from the Army where it had been in the hands of Thomas Fairfax's secretary John Rushworth and his assistant Gilbert Mabbot. In September 1647, as Royalist material flourished, Fairfax protested and Mabbot was reinstated.⁸⁸ But the flood of Royalist mercuries continued as the Second Civil War loomed.

John Dillingham was in 1648 producing a title called *The Moderate Intelligencer*. Dillingham, previously associated with Oliver St John's Middle Group, expressed sentiments sympathetic to John Lilburne. Mabbot refused to licence Dillingham and in the interim a counterfeit *Moderate Intelligencer* appeared, using Dillingham's printer Robert White with whom he was also in dispute. Dillingham protested to the Lords and they upheld his complaint. Dillingham moved to another printer and continued *The Moderate Intelligencer*. White continued to publish his counterfeit under the abbreviated title *The Moderate*. Out of this tangled web, and possibly only out of such a tangled web, a Leveller newsbook was born.

Mabbot is sometimes cited as the editor of *The Moderate*, but the evidence is far from conclusive and politically there is nothing to suggest that he had Leveller sympathies. Indeed the *The Moderate* itself scotched contemporary rumours that Mabbot was involved. Brailsford supports the theory of Mabbot's involvement but, more plausibly if we are to rely on style of expression, sees the hand of Overton in the writing.⁸⁹ However this maybe, from the moment of its launch in July 1648 to the moment of its disappearance in September 1649 *The Moderate* remained an extraordinary organ of the Leveller movement. It began on the model of *The Moderate Intelligencer* with twelve pages and much foreign news. After three issues it re-oriented, beginning again with a new issue No.1 which was cut back to eight pages and moved its publication date from Thursday to Tuesday. In its sixth issue it introduced its characteristic Leveller editorial.

Roger Howell and David Brewster have argued that 'The political thought of the *Moderate* is neither startling nor original in many of its aspects. Much of what the paper had to say about

⁸⁸ J Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper*, pp. 53-54.

⁸⁹ *The Moderate*, No. 12, 26 September-3 October 1648. E465[25]. See also F Henderson, 'Gilbert Mabbot', ODNB. J Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper*, pp. 65-66. H N Brailsford, (Christopher Hill ed.) *The Levellers and the English Revolution* (Nottingham, Spokesman, 1961) pp. 402-403.

government, the people, God, and their mutual relations was built on political commonplaces'. They base this on the contention that neither the *The Moderate's* attitude to the franchise nor to religious toleration were particularly radical.⁹⁰ There is quite a lot wrong with this approach. Firstly, the very existence of newsbooks was both startling and original to many in the 1640s, and one which expressed Leveller sympathies even more so. The Earl of Leicester railed that *The Moderate* 'endeavours to invite people to overthrow all propriety, as the original cause of sin; and by that to destroy all government, magistracy, honesty, civility, and humanity'.⁹¹ Of course the Earl was scare-mongering. But that is not the usual reaction to something that one finds 'neither startling nor original'. Secondly, *The Moderate* was in fact more outspoken on the need for a wide franchise and for religious toleration than some of the Leveller leaders, especially in those moments when they were trying to reach political accommodation with Independent allies. But even the more conservative formulations of the Levellers would have led them to the Tower, if not Tyburn, a mere eight years since. In 1648, people were still fighting and dying in every corner of the country over precisely these issues. Thirdly, Howell and Brewster do not consider the most important dimension of the *The Moderate*. The paper was not primarily a site for the discussion of Leveller political theory. It was intended as a popular intervention aiming to alter the course of a fast developing political crisis. In the midst of a Presbyterian inspired and popular demand for a Personal Treaty with the king, *The Moderate* aimed to rally the forces of the revolution in a moment of crisis. With less reservation than some Leveller leaders it campaigned for Charles to be brought to justice and for some kind of popular rule to replace the existing state. This was of a piece with the entire direction of Leveller political activity in the critical 12 months of 1648.

The Moderate of the 26 September-3 October 1648, for instance, responded to the murder of two Parliamentary officers in this way: 'We do protest that if the Royal slaves continue this Insolencie... we will for every one man's life, take a hundred of their party... and will hang up their heads on Spires and Steeples, that the world may see the just judgement of God upon

⁹⁰ R Howell, Jr. and D E Brewster, 'Reconsidering the Levellers: The Evidence of the Moderate Author(s)', *Past and Present*, No. 46 (Feb., 1970), pp. 68-86.

⁹¹ J Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper*, p. 67.

these Rebels and Traytors, which his Majesty confesses are guilty of the innocent blood of 400,000 souls who have perished in this war'. The following issue was largely given over to re-printing petitions in support of the Leveller's large petition of 11 September 1648, a key moment in turning the tide against demands for a Personal Treaty. *The Moderate* then went on in its next issue to argue that if Parliament betrayed the trust of the people by consorting with their enemies then 'it is Lawful for the people of the Nation to wage war against them'.⁹²

This remarkable single-mindedness tends to disprove Howell and Brewster's larger point that the 'Levellers, far from being a unified party with an agreed programme, were a complex and, in many ways, unhappy alliance of malcontents, not wholly certain either in aim or in leadership'. In evidence they quote Baptist and Leveller Henry Denne: 'We were an Heterogenial Body consisting of parts very diverse from another, settled upon principles inconsistent one with another'. Denne was of course one of the four Burford mutineers condemned to death. He was the only one reprieved and the statement here comes from his recantation.⁹³ The Levellers responded directly to this point in their reply to Denne. They made the obvious point that it was not 'impossible that this Hetergenerall body, these severall parts, so diversified by light and darknesse, good and evil, should be concentrick, as to joynt pursuance of publique ends'.⁹⁴ More generally the point that Howell and Brewster make about the Levellers could be made of any political movement, or even of supposedly more monolithic modern political parties. It seems unlikely, for instance, that there is more ideological distance between John Lilburne and the writers of *The Moderate* than between some leading figures in contemporary political parties. In fact for their time and by many longer historical standards the Leveller leaders were remarkably homogeneous in thought, co-operative in authorship and collective in organisation. They were skilled in print propaganda. And printing was at the heart of the emergence of the Leveller movement. Over time Overton, Lilburne, Larner, and their co-workers repeatedly

⁹² *The Moderate*, No.12, 26 September-3 October 1648. E465[25]. *The Moderate*, No.13, 3 October-10 October 1648. E467[15]. *The Moderate*, No. 14, 10 October-17 October 1648. E468[2].

⁹³ H Denne, *The Levellers Designe Discovered* (London, 1649) p. 8. See R Howell, Jr. and D E Brewster, 'Reconsidering the Levellers: The Evidence of the Moderate Author(s)', pp. 69-70.

⁹⁴ *Sea Green and Blue* (London, 1649) p. 2. E559[1].

judged the moments of political crisis and sought to shape their outcomes. In doing so they built a network of political support which proved essential in the final crisis of the revolution.⁹⁵

Mercurius Militaris or The Army Scout

Mercurius Militaris or *The Army Scout* was even sharper in tone and more militant in rhetoric, but was also shorter-lived, than *The Moderate*. It appeared five times at the very height of the revolutionary crisis between October and November 1648. The title was used once more the following year by the Levellers, although the same title was used once before by a Royalist and once in 1649 by an anti-Leveller journalist. The five issues were edited by John Harris. Perhaps it was Harris' former employment as an actor which gave the *Mercurius Militaris* its sense of timing, because it certainly made its entrance just at the moment when the tide needed turning in the Levellers' favour.⁹⁶ Harris had already run an Army press with Henry Hills, who gained his entry to the printing trade thanks to John Lilburne. The press was originally based at Oxford, Harris' home town. It was set-up by Leveller Agitator Edward Sexby in May 1647. This was at the very height of the crisis resulting from Parliament's attempt to disband the Army.⁹⁷ Two letters concerning this press exist in the Clarke manuscripts. The one dated 17 May 1647 is definitely from Sexby. It is a short urgent note to the Agitators insisting that 'If there is not [*s] a presse got into the Army we shall be att a losse, there want nothing butt Mony therefore tell the Officers they must disburse the Mony.' Sexby's urgency is a product of the fact that he thinks that 'The King will it is verily thought come and joyne with' the Army's parliamentary enemies. He encourages the Agitators to spread their grievances rapidly and instructs them to send messengers to 'Rainsborowe's Regiment' and 'two more to London to Convey newes'.⁹⁸ In the second letter, which Charles Firth attributes to Sexby although it is not signed, and dates on

⁹⁵ See also D Como, 'Secret Printing...', p. 82.

⁹⁶ See J Peacey, 'The hunting of the Leveller: the sophistication of parliamentary propaganda, 1647-53', *Historical Research*, Vol. 78, No. 199 (February, 2005).

⁹⁷ Clarke MSS. 100 f.30-31 is a letter dated 17 May, the same day as Sexby's letter concerning the need for a press to be set up in the Army. It concerns the meeting at Walton and is signed by Sexby, Leveller William Allen and others listing the Agitators chosen and an account of the meeting. Its central demands concern pay, disbandment, and deployment to Ireland. At the same time a letter was sent from Letter from the 'Agitators of Horse to the Horse in the North'. See Clarke MSS. 100 f.48-49.

⁹⁸ Clarke MSS. 110 f.53. The large asterisk with a small 's' next to it in Sexby's text seems to be a coded reference to an individual, perhaps Harris. Sexby signs the letter with a similar asterisk but without the small 's' adjacent.

internal evidence as written on the 18th May, the author, insists the Agitator's previous 'Printer is taken and undone' and that unless another press is found 'wee are undone'. The Letter continues by recommending 'one perfect' workmen.⁹⁹ It is unlikely to be a co-incidence that Harris arrived with the Army on that very day, the 18th May.¹⁰⁰

Sexby's hopes for funding from the officers were only partially fulfilled. Some payments were made to Harris, but the press seems to have remained a rudimentary operation.¹⁰¹ Its type was limited and its productions poor quality. But it produced a stream of soldier inspired documents, beginning with *A True Declaration of the Present Proceedings of the Army*.¹⁰² Others included *A Declaration of Master William Lenthall*, printed in 'Oxford by J Harris and H Hills', *A Letter Sent from the Agitators of the Army* and *The Resolutions of the Agitators of the Army*.¹⁰³ On 30 September 1647, as we seen, Parliament reappointed Gilbert Mabbot as licenser in response to a complaint from Thomas Fairfax about the proliferation of unlicensed printing. Thus 'the political press passed under the control of the army, and there was no further need of Harris and his travelling press'.¹⁰⁴ But Harris continued to print. In November 1647, after the Army had moved to London, Harris printed Sexby's *A Letter sent from Several Agitators of the Army to their Respective Regiments*.¹⁰⁵ Around the same time, under the anagrammatic alias Sirrahniho, Harris wrote *The Grand Designe* demanding the release of Lilburne and providing a staunch defence of

⁹⁹ W Clarke, *The Clarke Papers*, Vol. I (London, Royal Historical Society, 1992) p. 86. See also M Mendle, 'Putney's pronouns: identity and indemnity in the great debate', pp. 126-133.

¹⁰⁰ A Woolrych, *Soldiers and Statesmen* (Oxford, OUP, 1987) p. 93 n. 7.

¹⁰¹ A Woolrych, *Soldiers and Statesmen*, p. 133.

¹⁰² M Mendle, 'Putney's pronouns: identity and indemnity in the great debate', pp. 126-133. Mendle's account is diminished by his attempt to exaggerate Harris' Royalist sympathies. While it is true that Harris's wife Susanna did have such sympathies and was eulogised on her death by Sir George Wharton (*In Memorie of that Lively Patternne of True Pietie, and unstained Loyaltie...* (1649) 669 f.15.1. It is also the case that Wharton attacked *Mercurius Militaris*. In his *Mercurius Impartialis* he called Harris a 'rogue', a 'rebel' and a 'Mad-man'. E476[3], pp. 2-3. Mendle does not mention *Mercurius Militaris* and its pronounced hostility to the king.

¹⁰³ *A Declaration of Master William Lenthall*. Wing L1072, *A Letter Sent from the Agitators of the Army*. Wing L1605, *The Resolutions of the Agitators of the Army*. E405[22].

¹⁰⁴ C Firth in W Clarke, *The Clarke Papers*, Vol. I, p. 86 note b.

¹⁰⁵ *A Letter sent from Several Agitators of the Army to their Respective Regiments*. E414[8].

the Levellers *Agreement of the People*. It is also one of the key sources indicating Cromwell's involvement in Cornet Joyce's seizure of the King and Holdenby House.¹⁰⁶

Mercurius Militaris was, unlike *The Moderate*, unlicensed. Harris' Royalist opponents reported that in the last 'weeke there were no lesse then twentie State-Beagles Hunting after him'.¹⁰⁷ The prose of *Mercurius Militaris* was also unlicensed, the humour mocking and the phrases memorable.¹⁰⁸ Its first issue explained to readers curious about why news of soldiers was still important 'now their lives are secured they are to attend to their Work, which we may all remember was, *To Set the People Free*'. News followed of petitions from Gloucester, York, Newcastle, and Somerset all supporting the Levellers' Large Petition. *Mercurius Militaris* was scathing about the monarchy. Harris could see the father in the son since both James I and Charles I believed in the principle 'No Bishop, no King'. But he still doubted that King James 'begot' King Charles otherwise 'I cannot tell how King Charles could be so sober'. *Mercurius Militaris*' last item was news of the Royalist surrender of Appleby Castle and it concluded with an epigram expressing the thought that the Personal Treaty was the last hope of the defeated Cavaliers:

Their strength is spent, now, now, they cry,

Hold Treaty, hold, or else we dye.¹⁰⁹

Readers might guess what was ahead when the second issue asked on its first page: 'Didst ever know a Tyrant or a King, that was content the people's eyes should be opened? It's against their interest; if the horse his eyes be not blinded, he will never grind the mill'.¹¹⁰ When the Lords voted that the King should come to London in safety to negotiate a Treaty *Mercurius* wrote: 'this makes me think the King is an Alchemist and the Lords are his Mercury...he can make them dance the Philosophical circle four of five times an hour, like an Ape through a hoop, or a Dog

¹⁰⁶ J Harris, *The Grand Designe* (1647). E419[15]. In the same year, though presumably earlier since it was printed in Oxford, Harris' *The Antipodes, or Reformation with the Heeles Upward* (Oxford, 1647) railed at the Grandees and protested the imprisonment of Lilburne and Overton. E399[16].

¹⁰⁷ G Wharton, *Mercurius Impartialis*, p. 2. E476[3].

¹⁰⁸ Harris's prose style may have been influenced by his previous calling as an actor. See M Heinemann, 'Popular Drama and Leveller Style', pp. 69-93.

¹⁰⁹ *Mercurius Militaris*, No. 1, 10 October 1648. E467[34].

¹¹⁰ *Mercurius Militaris*, No. 2, 10 October-17 October 1648. E468[35].

in a wheel'.¹¹¹ Of all those that cried out at the death of Rainsborough *Mercurius Militaris* did so most passionately and eloquently. But it also pinned the blame on apostates in the Parliamentary camp and called directly for the king's blood by way of revenge.¹¹² Perhaps it was *Mercurius Militaris*' statement that 'The children of kings are all born with crowns upon their heads and the people with saddles on their backs' that Leveller soldier Richard Rumbold was recalling when 37 years later he said on the gallows 'none comes into the world with a saddle upon his back, neither any boot and spurred to ride him'. On the day that Charles I was executed John Harris, with a half-pike in hand, and Richard Rumbold both served as guards on the scaffold.¹¹³

At the very end of 1648, after Lilburne had withdrawn from the negotiations with the officers over the *Agreement of the People*, he nevertheless organised a substantial delegation of Levellers to personally hand Cromwell 'a complaint against their dealing with us, and a kinde of Protest against their proceedings'. John Harris was there, alongside Thomas Prince, Richard Overton and Lilburne himself. The document was immediately printed under the auspices of William Larner.¹¹⁴ A core of these political activists had been collaborating since the very early years of the decade. Many others, Harris included, had come around them in that time. The core, and many others, were organised to an important degree by the business of printing and the use of printed material. Indeed, this use of print is one of the things that marks the Levellers out as an organised political movement, rather than, in the language of the day, merely an Interest or Faction.

The evidence of the crackdown

After the execution of the king in January 1649 the Independent-Leveller alliance of the previous year fell apart. Amidst the reaction, whose most famous moments are the crushing of the Lockyer and Burford mutinies of April and May 1649 and the state reimposed control of printing, the Levellers were early casualties. On the 28th March the newly formed Council of

¹¹¹ *Mercurius Militaris*, No. 3, 24 October-31 October 1648. E469[10].

¹¹² *Mercurius Militaris*, No. 4, 31 October-8 November 1648. E470[14].

¹¹³ *The Speech of Major John Harris* (London, 1660) p. 3. E1043[3]. See also C V Wedgwood, *A King Condemned: The Trial and Execution of Charles I* (London, Tauris Parke, 2011) p. 189. R Clifton, 'Richard Rumbold', ODNB.

¹¹⁴ J Lilburne, *The Legal Fundamental Liberties* (1649) pp. 39-40. E567[1].

State issued a warrant to ‘apprehend John Lilburne, Walwin, Overton, and Thomas Prince for high treason, as being the authors, framers, or publishers of *The second part of England’s new chaines discovered*’. On 6th April the orders went out to search the prisoners’ trunks for ‘books, papers &c.’ and, separately, to ‘search and sieze a scandalous pamphlet called *The English Soldiers’ Standard* and the printers and publishers’. Three days later a new warrant was issued ‘to arrest Wm. Larner in Bishopsgate Street, and sieze all his books and papers’. On 4th July the prisoners in the Tower were once again ordered to be searched.¹¹⁵

Amid rumours of Leveller risings the orders to suppress the movement’s publications came thick and fast.¹¹⁶ In September *The Moderate* ceased to appear. On the 18th September the Council of State issued a warrant ‘for apprehending the persons who have subscribed to the book *Outcry*, as also the vindication of the Burford business’. This was John Lilburne’s *Outcry of the Young Men and Apprentices of London* and the printer Thomas Newcombe was jailed for printing it. At the same time the Council of State issued warrants ‘for apprehending the agitators in the meetings of the Levellers’ for ‘summoning witnesses against Lieut.-Col. Jno. Lilburne’ and for Lilburne to be sent to the Tower on charges of treason.¹¹⁷ The following day the Council of State was instructing the Justices of the Peace and the Committees of the Counties, under the pretext that the Levellers were conspiring with Royalists, to inform themselves of all ‘secret or open meetings or consultations’ of the Levellers, to ‘disperse all such meetings’ and to apprehend those involved, imprison them and charge them with treason.¹¹⁸ On the 19th September Lilburne was brought to trial. On the same day the order went out to arrest the ten men who had printed their names on the bottom of the *Outcry* describing themselves as the ‘Agents of the Youngmen and Apprentices of the City of London that love and approve the Agreement of the People...and the Vindication of the late defeated men at Burford, entituled,

¹¹⁵ TNA:PRO, Warrants of the Council of State, SP 18/6 f.1.

¹¹⁶ TNA: PRO, SP 25/94 f.447. Council of State to the Governor of Windsor Castle, 19th September 1649: ‘We have fresh information that the Levellers intend this night to make an attempt upon Windsor castle’.

¹¹⁷ TNA:PRO, SP 25/63/2 f.45

¹¹⁸ TNA:PRO, SP 25/94 f.447.

the Levellers vindicated'.¹¹⁹ On the 21st September Newcombe was freed, but only on the payment of a £300 fine, an undertaking not to print anymore 'scandalous or seditious' books against Parliament, and that he be 'ready to give evidence against' Lilburne.¹²⁰

For all the Council of State's efforts, Lilburne's trial was a personal triumph. He went within the space of a few weeks from his bootmaker being unwilling to make him a new pair of boots on the basis that he would have no need of them to having two medals struck to commemorate his legal triumph over the Cromwell.¹²¹ But the Council of State was still keen to suppress printed accounts of Lilburne's victory and the Levellers as a movement were broken.¹²² But what the level of repression indicates is the sheer scale of printing and organisational work that the state saw as necessary to combat, even when the high point of Leveller influence had passed. This in turn provides us with additional evidence of the scope of Leveller printing, the organisational work that went with it, and some indication of its effectiveness, at least in the eyes of the Levellers' opponents.

Conclusion

A core of Leveller activists remained engaged in writing, printing and distributing material throughout the 1640s. Lilburne, Overton, Walwyn, Larner, Prince, the Chidleys, and those that worked with and around them, sustained the production of revolutionary publications in illegal conditions for a decade. They were hunted, prosecuted and imprisoned throughout. They printed everything from single sheet petitions and leaflets to substantial books and, eventually, weekly newspapers. They organised distribution by giving away material in the street and at political gatherings; by selling it in bookshops, stalls and in the street; by having passed from hand to hand in the Army; or sent in packages around the country. If this is all they had done it would have been a remarkable feat of sustained organisation.

¹¹⁹ TNA:PRO, SP 18/6 f.1. and *Outcry of the Young Men and Apprentices of London* (London, 29 August 1649) p. 12.

¹²⁰ TNA:PRO, SP 25/63/2 f.48. See also I. Gadd, 'Thomas Newcombe the younger', *ODNB*.

¹²¹ See P Gregg, *Free-Born John* (London, Dent, 1961) pp. 293, 301-302.

¹²² TNA:PRO, Warrant of the Council of State, 6th December 1649, SP 18/6 f.1.

This core of activists drew around themselves very substantially greater numbers. Printed material was essential to communicating ideas to and organising these forces. And in the process the core of writers, printers and those involved in organisation grew. But none of this happened outside a wider balance of forces, especially those within the Parliamentary camp itself. The course of defining Leveller ideas and organisation can be seen as a process of coming to terms with a series of crises among Parliamentarians: the split between, for the sake of simplicity, the Presbyterians and the Independents, the division between the Silken Independents and the Agitators and London Levellers at Putney and after, the final reformation of the Independent-Leveller alliance that prevented the Personal Treaty with the king. In each of these crises it was the Levellers' ability to define the political tasks in print and to use printed material to organise their followers that made them able to play a significant part in shaping the eventual outcome of the English revolution.

Chapter 4

The Levellers and petitioning

Petitioning those in authority for redress of grievances was a widespread mediaeval tradition. It was a supplicatory process from individuals, local government, or economic institutions designed to win favour from those in the political elite. Most petitions were handwritten and submitted in the name of individuals or relatively small groups of petitioners. By the outbreak of the English revolution between 1640 and 1642 this practice was already being transformed by the use of printed petitions signed by thousands of people well beyond the political elite and they were used to bring extra-legal pressure on that elite. The argument of this chapter is that the Levellers emerged from this world of Parliamentary opposition to the Crown and developed their petitionary techniques in ways that were more radical in content, aim and organisation. As the revolution developed the Levellers emerged as a distinct organisation and their petitions played an important role in shaping the final outcome of the conflict.

The ‘public sphere’ debate

Much debate about the role of petitioning in 17th century England has taken place in the wider context of discussion about the ‘public sphere’, a term coined by social theorist Jurgen Habermas. Habermas argued that feudal society contained no space separate from the state in which politics could be shaped by the participation of private citizens in public discourse. This is a ‘public sphere’ in which ‘access is guaranteed to all citizens’. In it individuals behave differently from how they behave in both business, where they transact private affairs, and how they behave in a ‘constitutional order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy’.

Critical here is the thought that ‘The bourgeois public sphere’ is where ‘private people come together as a public’ to engage the authorities ‘in a debate over the general rules governing relations’. The public sphere requires ‘the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions~about matters of general interest’.¹

In Habermas’ account the ‘public sphere’ had a relatively short existence. It did not arise until the decline of feudal states and the rise of the modern nation state in the 18th century and it began to disappear with ‘the rise of the Chartist movement in England and the February revolution in France’ in the first half of the 19th century. The public sphere disappears because, in a period of mass democracy, it becomes ‘the field for the competition of interests, competitions which assume the form of violent conflict. Laws which obviously have come about under the “pressure of the street” can scarcely still be understood as arising from the consensus of private individuals’. The result is the ‘refeudalization’ of the public sphere.²

Others, like David Zaret, have argued that the public sphere emerged much earlier than the 18th century and that its coming into existence was to an important degree a result of the petitioning practices of the English revolution. For Zaret, ‘the change wrought by the use of printing in petitioning during the English Revolution provides empirical evidence for explaining how appeals to public opinion supplanted norms of secrecy in politics’.³ Neither does Zaret accept Habermas’ attempt to link the rise of the public sphere with the emergence of capitalist society.⁴ Peter Lake and Steven Pincus observe that ‘the public sphere has been moving back in time’. But they are careful to note that before the revolution political interaction was ‘not so much between the rulers and the ruled, as between elements within the regime and their allies’. Only the ‘unprecedented proliferation of newsprint, propaganda and petitioning’ after the revolution

¹ J Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Oxford, OUP, 1992) p. 27. See also J Habermas, ‘The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)’ in *New German Critique*, No.3 (Autumn, 1974) p. 49.

² J Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, pp. 222-235 and J Habermas, ‘The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)’, p. 50 and p. 54.

³ D Zaret, ‘Petitions and the “Invention” of Public Opinion in the English Revolution’ in *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 101, No. 6 (May, 1996) p. 1499.

⁴ D Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture, Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early-Modern England* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000) p. 32.

began transformed this situation. They conclude that the public sphere did not become fully developed until after 1688.⁵

James Holstun finds Habermas' analysis useful in drawing attention to the way in which communicative media, including petitioning, emerged as 'historical phenomena in their own right, not mere vehicles of a history independent of them'. He also agrees with Habermas' attention to the '*pre-political* forms of sociability that create habits of publicness' and thus prepare the way for a 'full-scale, even oppositional, political public sphere'. But Holstun also sees weaknesses in Habermas' approach. One is that Habermas, and even more so Zaret, underestimate the degree to which the public sphere is shaped by 'the "private sphere" of class society'. The second is that there is no such thing as a single public sphere in the way in which Habermas imagines, but a series of public areas of debate which include those created by the labouring classes.⁶ Habermas himself had ruled out consideration of the '*plebeian* public sphere' on the basis that it was 'suppressed in the historical process'.⁷ Ellen Meiksins Wood makes a different but related point when she argues that the public sphere 'had less to do with asserting "bourgeois" interests against the state, or marking out a new space outside the state for the development of capitalism, than with bourgeois demands for access to the state and the fruits of office'.⁸

What many of these criticisms of Habermas have in common, whatever their substantive differences, is that they see his notion of the public sphere as too abstract, almost a Weberian 'ideal type'. The gist of the arguments is a demand to locate the emergence of the public sphere in the institutional, technological, social and political practices of the English Revolution. The problem is, however, that in performing this task the notion of the public sphere may be tested to destruction. For Habermas it is definitional of the public sphere that it is a single space open to all citizens. Equally important is that the public space is not seen as an arena for conflict

⁵ P Lake and S Pincus, 'Rethinking the public sphere in early modern England' in P Lake and S Pincus (eds.), *The Politics of the Public Sphere in early Modern England* (Manchester, MUP, 2007) pp. 1, 9, 13.

⁶ J Holstun, *Ebbs' Dagger, Class Struggle in the English Revolution* (London, Verso, 2000) pp. 106-112.

⁷ J Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. xviii.

⁸ E Meiksins Wood, *Liberty and Property, A Social History of Western Political Thought from Renaissance to Enlightenment* (London, Verso, 2012) p. 172.

between mass, organised political forces. Finally, for Habermas ‘pressure from the street’ in the creation of laws is an abrogation of the public sphere. Yet the petitioning practice of all forces in the English revolution, but particularly that of the Parliamentarians and the Levellers, involved all these things. To the extent that there was a common ‘market-place for ideas’ it was a contested space in which various, often mutually incompatible, proposals clashed. And this sphere only partially over-lapped with equally important but distinct audiences for Royalist ideas, or Independent ideas or Leveller ideas. In these areas arguments were made not merely or mainly to *intellectually* overpower opponents but to inspire and mobilise supporters to *literally* overpower opponents. Some of these arguments were very definitely advanced by organised bodies or lobbies which did not see themselves or their opponents as single atomised citizens who might be swayed by public debate. These were ‘partisan positions’ of ‘rivals fighting their own corner’ not ‘some general coming together of concerned citizens’ creating a public sphere, as Ann Hughes notes.⁹ It is especially true of the Levellers and other radicals that the ‘pressure of the street’ and later the ‘pressure of the army’ stood in support of the petitions that marked turning points in the history of the revolution. So we might conclude that the freedoms Habermas sees as defining the public sphere were coerced out of the state by organised groups prepared to use extra-legal force, or the threat of its use, to achieve their ends. Leveller petitioning is an example.

The context of Leveller petitions

Before the English revolution the petition was the very opposite of the revolutionary tool that it became in the hands of the Levellers. Petitions were previously a plea for redress over a wide variety of issues directed to the political hierarchy by individuals or local office holders or corporate bodies. What they were not were expressions of popular discontent culminating in demands for changes to the law, let alone to the government of the nation.

At a local level petitions might concern paternity suits, the right to erect cottages, the care of disabled or homeless people, disputed land sales, or the sanctions to be applied to disruptive

⁹ A Hughes, *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford, OUP, 2004), pp. 414-415.

neighbours. In 1638, for instance, John Haviland sent a handwritten petition to the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, asking to be granted the right to print books. Laud's note written on the bottom of the petition says that 'I desire Sir John Lambe to consider... how far forth it may be fit to grant the petitioner's desire'.¹⁰ Lambe was, as we have seen in a previous chapter, an extreme anti-Puritan and Laud's enforcer. He was charged with dealing with a larger and more political petition delivered to the Archbishop on 6th October 1638. Also handwritten, this petition was from Milliners at the Royal Exchange. The 10 signatories wanted Laud to do something about Stationers who were selling books other than 'Bible, Testament and Psalms' and taking away the living of the Milliners.¹¹

Petitions concerning national issues were usually sent by local government bodies, the mayor or burgesses perhaps, to the monarch asking for redress. The 'Mayor, Sheriffs, Citizens and Commonalty' of Norwich, for instance, petitioned Charles I about religious practice in the town's churches. They complained of the 'alteration of benches and pews' and that 'The Communion Table (now termed Alter) by direction in many places[is] now set upon steps...'. Two hand written pages later they ended their considerable list of complaints with a plea to fill five or six preaching ministries because 'whereas in former times there were... but 3 or 4 Popish recusants' there are now 'above 40 Popish Recusants' who have recently been indicted. Yet the tone remained formulaic and reverential, ending with 'And your petitioners as in Duty bound will dayly pray for your Majesties long and happy Raigne'.¹²

At a national level the House of Commons had established itself as a petitioning body from the 1300s. Here a distinction came to be made between 'singular' petitions and 'common interest' petitions which asked the monarch to intercede on a matter said to be of general interest to the community. But in all these cases petitions were a request from a supplicant to a higher authority.¹³ As Puritanism became a defined current after the Reformation the petition acquired new dimensions: 'the first, to lobby Parliament in the direction of a more reformed church; the

¹⁰ Bod., Tanner MSS., Vol. 67, f. 34.

¹¹ Bod., Tanner MSS., Vol. 67, f. 33.

¹² Bod., Tanner MSS., Vol. 68, f. 160. Not dated but bound with material from 1636.

¹³ A Patterson, *Reading Between the Lines* (Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 1993) pp. 62-64.

second, to indicate, by number of signatories the size of the lobby'. James I complained that a petition of 1610 which came on a piece of vellum measuring 41 inches by 32 inches was 'big enough to hang a small room.' This petition was outspoken in its criticism of the increasing use of Royal proclamations by the King.¹⁴

Most petitions before the revolution were handwritten. There was a brief increase in printed petitions to Parliament in 1621 but they then declined until the upsurge of 1640-41.¹⁵ MPs, however, were increasingly distrustful of verbal communication with the King and preferred that petitions and the answers to them be in writing. In 1621 one MP said, 'I think it is best to recommend to the King by petition in writing, for that which is done by word the manner may be forgotten, but *litera scripta manet*' (what is written remains). Another MP drew attention to the fact that a written reply would have the same force as an act of parliament, 'If we go by message we can have but a verbal answer, which cannot be a precedent, neither can it equal an act of parliament'. Parliament increasingly attempted to have petitions and their answers included in the parliament rolls stored in the Tower according to 'ancient precedents'.¹⁶ By the time of the Petition of Right in 1628 Parliament had developed a strategy for attempting to deal with the monarch's increasing use of proclamations. A petition of right required an answer from the King, whereas a petition of grace did not.

Two years after Laud received the Milliners petition he was informed of an altogether more serious threat posed by petitioners. On the 10th September 1640 he was told that 'today near 300 citizens resorted by companies of 20 or 30 to consult and subscribe to a petition'. Even more threateningly, 'there are 30 in the City have joined together to maintain a press to print seditious and libellous books, in particular one entitled *A Reply to a Relation of the Conference between William Laud and Mr Fisher, the Jesuit*'. This may have been a product of a press run by future Leveller Richard Overton.¹⁷ As ever Sir John Lambe was on the case of the distributor, a man who 'lurks

¹⁴ See A Patterson, *Reading Between the Lines*, pp. 64-65, 69.

¹⁵ D. Hirst, 'Making Contact: Petitions and the English Republic', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (January 2006) p. 40 n. 63.

¹⁶ See A Patterson, *Reading Between the Lines*, pp. 64-65.

¹⁷ D Como, 'Secret Printing, the Crisis of 1640 and the Origins of Civil War Radicalism', *Past and Present*, No.196 (August, 2007) pp. 49-54.

around Gray's Inn in a satin doublet...with a cloak bag full of books...'.¹⁸ The following year 20,000 subscribed to a petition calling for 'Justice to bee executed upon the Earle of Strafford'.¹⁹ Worse was still to come. Out of the 40 English counties a full 38 sent petitions to Parliament between December 1641 and August 1642, according to Anthony Fletcher. At this stage the gentry often took the lead, but large numbers of signatories were sought well beyond the elite with petition rolls often bearing the marks of the illiterate. They were overwhelmingly male, but not exclusively so, as can be seen on a Middlesex petition from 1642 which has over 2,000 handwritten individual signatures. Lancashire and Suffolk petitions had above 4,000 signatures. Shropshire had 10,000. Essex had 30,000. Huge cavalcades brought them to Parliament's door: 3,000 from Buckinghamshire, stretching all the way from the Royal Exchange to Newgate. The crowd from Kent was at least 7,000 strong and may have been as large as 10,000. The petitions were printed, and printed for distribution after presentation.²⁰ Fletcher emphasises the degree of gentry leadership but even at this early stage deference was breaking down. On 31st January 1642 poor women petitioned for the first time. Some 400 besieged Parliament and were involved in a scuffle with the Earl of Lennox.²¹ Of the *The Humble Petition of many hundreds of distressed Women, Trades-mens Wives and Widdows* of 1642 Ann Hughes notes, 'The affinities between the rhetoric deployed here, and the later language of Leveller women's petitions, are too close to be simply coincidental, or even to indicate simple borrowings. They suggest continuity of personnel within the radical London circles whence the levellers emerged, and perhaps connections with the zealous MP Henry Marten'.²² By 1642 even Charles was bemoaning 'the many mistakes' that 'have arisen by Messages, Petitions and Answers betwixt Us and Our two Houses of parliament'.²³ Times, and the scale and significance of petitioning, were changing fast.²⁴

¹⁸ TNA: PRO, SP 16/467 f.16.

¹⁹ Anon, 'The Petition of the Citizens of London...'. 669 f.4[13].

²⁰ HLMP, HL/PO/JO/10/1/112. A Fletcher, *The Outbreak of the English Civil War* (London, Arnold, 1981) pp. 191-197.

²¹ M Braddick, *God's Fury, England's Fire* (London, Penguin, 2008) pp. 184-185.

²² A Hughes, *Gender and the English Revolution* (London, Routledge, 2012) p. 55.

²³ 'His Majesties Gracious Message...' E.83[2].

²⁴ See, for instance, J. Peacey, 'News, Politics and People, 1603-1714' (Cengage Learning EMEA Ltd, 2010).

Any suggestion that petitions be addressed to those from outside the political elite immediately drew hostile responses from those defending the status quo. As early as 1592 a pamphlet called *A Petition directed to her Majestie* was imported from Middleburg calling for the freeing of imprisoned dissenters. The pamphlet was anonymous, but may have been the work of Job Throckmorton who may also have been the author of the Marprelate tracts. The Dean of Exeter, Matthew Sutcliffe, made the establishment reply in which he was as concerned that the *Petition* had been published and distributed as he was about anything it said. Likening the petitioners to 'Jacke Straw and Wat Tyler', Sutcliffe asks, 'seeing this petition directed to her Majestie, to what end is the same put in print? Belike the man's purpose is, so much as the Queene by wisdom shall denie, the people by force, and furie shall establish'.²⁵

Sutcliffe was right to worry about the printing of pamphlets and petitions. Printing, even in restricted numbers, could only mean an appeal to a wider audience than the individual or body to whom petitions had been traditionally addressed. There is a direct line of descent from Sutcliffe's protestation in 1592 to Sir Edward Dering's reaction in the parliamentary debate on the Long Parliament's decision to have the Grand Remonstrance printed in 1641, 'When I first heard of a Remonstrance... I did not dream that we should remonstrate downward, tell stories to the people, and talk of the King as of a third person'.²⁶

The petition had been transformed over this period from a time-worn supplicatory practice within a deeply hierarchical system into a new form of ideological and political activity addressing a wider audience by use of both technical and organisational methods not previously combined in this way or for this purpose. And as the revolutionary process developed the Levellers' petitionary activity underwent its own moments of transformation. The drawing together of the Levellers and the agitators in the New Model Army in 1647 was one such moment. The Levellers intervention in the contest between pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty petitions is 1648 another.

²⁵ See A Patterson, *Reading Between the Lines*, pp. 72-73.

²⁶ Quoted in T C Pease, *The Leveller Movement* (Gloucester, Mass., Peter Smith, 1965) p. 17.

How did the Levellers petition?

All petitioning requires some degree of organisation. Even petitions wholly within the accepted norms of a hierarchical society necessitate the formulation of a plea, its articulation in written form, the co-ordination of its delivery and the organisation of support for its aims. We catch a glimpse of some of the organisation needed in the pre-revolutionary *Complaint of Journeymen Against Master Printers*. The petition complains of ‘the keeping of presses for printing, contrary to the decree of the Star Chamber’ as ‘a way to maintain forrerners (sic)’ and others by ‘master printers who look for nothing but their own’. The degree of organisation involved emerges when we compare the first draft, written in a rough hand and signed by about 40 names in different handwriting, with the second draft, also handwritten but in a much more polished hand. It is signed by about 86 names. And though it states that the signatures ‘Witness our hands’ in actual fact the names listed are all in the same handwriting. Many names from the first rough version appear on the second version. The process of petitioning involved signers giving their names on a rough version (and more than one rough version may have been in circulation) and that those were then collated with others onto a more carefully prepared final version.²⁷ At least a small collaborative group would be necessary for such work.

Printing petitions enabled this sort of organisation to take place on a wholly greater scale. Printed copies of petitions would be used to gather signatures and then another would be printed to distribute the final version to a wider audience. Printed material might be distributed in the streets at night. George Thomason makes a handwritten comment on no less than 15 broadsides noting that they were scattered in the streets at night. Others were noted as given away at Westminster or pinned to Church doors.²⁸ By 1650 a petition appeared that had this specific instruction printed on it: ‘This is printed only for the better gathering of Subscriptions, ‘tis desired you would make no other use of it’.²⁹ An early example, from January 1641, is a petition printed for future Leveller William Larnier. The petition is remarkable as a plea ‘from

²⁷ Bod., Tanner MSS, Vol. 67, f.193 and f. 194.

²⁸ See G K Fortescue, Preface, *British Museum Catalogue of Thomason Tracts 1640-1652*, Vol. I (London, 1908) p. xxiii.

²⁹ Anon, *To the Honourable, the Commons Assembled in Parliament...* 669 f.15[54].

many thousand poor people...who are of the meanest rank and quality being touched by penury'. It is directed against the Bishops and the House of Lords and threatens that, if the Commons do not act, 'your Petitioners shall not rest in quietness, but shall be inforced to lay hold on the next remedy which is at hand, to remove the disturbers of our peace, want, and necessity, breaking the bounds of modesty'. The printed instruction at the foot of the petition says 'For the use of the Petitioners who are to meet this present day in Moor Fields, and from thence to go to the house of Parliament with it in their hands'.³⁰ By 1641 Lerner was, as we have seen, already working with other future Levellers.³¹ A small, separately printed sheet from 1642 called on 'You that are Subscribers to the Apprentices Petition, are desired to meet at the Piazzzi in Covent-Garden on Munday the second of January by seven of the clock in the morning, in complete civill habit, without Swords or Staves'.³²

Thus from an early stage the printing of multiple copies of petitions was linked to popular mobilisation. Specific, printed notifications for this purpose were being produced both on and separately from the petitions themselves. Indeed the very signing of petitions seems to have been a mass activity in some cases. In 1642 a Royalist pamphlet sanctioned by Charles I complained 'what a shame it is that an ignorant Separatist shall covertly draw subscribers out of blind zeal to loose papers.' Even more disturbingly, 'a few Innovators shall be able to summon to Blackheath, Southwark, and Saint George his fields thousands of credulous people, with implicit faiths, to goe along with petitions, shall be showed them when they come there, for the alteration of laws and government'. The degree to which this had upset the normal hierarchy is clear from the immediately following complaint that resolutions from assizes and Justices supporting the 'laws and government', though 'published in all parishes...shall not produce one Patriot to present the unanimous desires of a County'.³³

In 1643 a peace petition shows methods of organisation that were common to all political forces involved in petitioning. It was being prepared at the Merchant Taylors Hall and those

³⁰ Anon, *To the Honourable The House of Commons Assembled in Parliament...*, 669 f.4[54].

³¹ K Lindley, *Popular Politics and Religion in Civil War London* (Aldershot, Scolar, 1997) pp. 393-394.

³² Anon, *You that are Subscribers to the Apprentices Petition...*, E83[46]. This is misallocated in Early English Books Online.

³³ Sir Thomas Aston, *The Collector to the Reader in A Collection of Sundry Petitions...*, E150[28].

that wanted to sign were asked to attend on Wednesday 19th July at any hour of the day from ‘4 of the clock in the morning till 8 in the Evening, there to heare and subscribe a Petition to Parliament, (which thousands have already subscribed)’. This brief, printed, one page notice concludes with a passage which clearly demonstrates the level of organisation that stood behind petitioning at this point: ‘The *Wednesday* above mentioned, is the Last and Onley day appointed to compleat the *Petition*. Wherefore all *Gentlemen* that have any Copies thereof in their hands are Desired to bring them In, at the Time and Place above said’.³⁴ In April 1647 a handwritten note told ‘Fellow Apprentices’ that they were ‘desired...at 7 of the clock to meet in Covent Garden for the prosecution of the late presented petition’.³⁵ In 1648 a petition unusual for its systematic advocacy of the case of the poor for economic relief from the economic elite, possibly a result of Leveller influence, contained a printed postscript which gives us another view of the organisation which stood behind this sort of petition: ‘It is desired that this Petition be read in Parish Churches, and that all subscriptions gathered thereunto, be sent to the House of *William Wallis* a Hosier, at the sign of the Gun at Aldgate, *London*, upon, or before the 14 day of March, 1648’.³⁶ In 1649 the same Leveller petition can be found in two editions. The first is addressed to those who might be willing to give their signature; the second is designed for distribution among the public at large.³⁷ This tactic was used by Royalists, Presbyterians and Independents as well as Levellers. But the Levellers seem to have been operating on a qualitatively different scale.

Women mounted their own, sometimes violent, demonstrations for peace in 1642 and 1643.³⁸ As early as 1645 women who would be associated with the Leveller cause were producing printed material in their own right. In November 1645 Katherine Chidley, mother of the future Leveller treasurer Samuel Chidley, and a formidable activist herself published the latest of her anti-Presbyterian tracts, a one page leaflet called *Good Counsell, to the Presbyterian Government, That*

³⁴ Anon, *All sorts of well-affected persons...*, E61[3].

³⁵ *Fellow Apprentices...*, E.384[12].

³⁶ Anon, *To the Honourable, the Supream Authority of this Nation...*, 669 f.13[89].

³⁷ See D Zaret, ‘Petitions and the “Invention” of Public Opinion in the English Revolution’, *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 101, No. 6 (May, 1996) p. 1520.

³⁸ P Higgins, ‘The Reactions of Women, with special reference to women petitioners’ in B Manning (ed.), *Politics, Religion and the English Civil War* (London, 1973) pp. 184-199.

they may declare their Faith before they build their Church, even if she only signed the sheet with her initials.³⁹ By 1649 there were mass demonstrations in support of petitions by Leveller women wearing ‘Sea-Green and black Ribbons... on their Brests’. The Levellers’ opponents derided them as ‘Amazons’, ‘Viragos of the Seagreen Order’ and ‘the lusty lasses of the levelling party’.⁴⁰ That women should print and demonstrate in favour of such disputatious material was a novel departure.⁴¹

In 1646 William Larner was jailed for his illegal printing activities. He petitioned for his freedom on numerous occasions. And so, on at least two occasions, did his wife Ellen Larner. In the second of these petitions she tells of William Larner’s service in Lord Robartes regiment and that ‘since his return home the Wardens and Beadle of the Company of Stationers, did sundry times search, ransack and break open your petitioners trunks, and injuriously carry away her goods’ in their search for her husband’s printed material. Ellen Larner goes on to say she is ‘with child’ and that seeing the ‘violent apprehension of her husband’ made her fall ‘into a dangerous sickness’. Ellen Larner’s petition, plus three petitions from William Larner himself, plus a letter from Larner to Sir Henry Vane, and an account of his persecution by Larner were all bound together and published in May 1646 as a pamphlet with the formidable title *A True Relation of all the Remarkable Passages, and Illegall Proceedings of some Sathannical or Doeg-like Accusers of their Brethern Against William Larner, A Free-man of England*.⁴² The same month a single printed sheet, *Every Man’s Case* was issued anonymously in ‘brotherly support to Mr Larner’. It denounced the Stationers as ‘Setting Dogges’ who, in the ‘Bishops times’, used to ‘hunt Good Men and Women into the *Star-Chamber* and *High-Commission* netts’.⁴³ In June Larner himself produced a second letter to Vane and a short second petition appeared from Ellen Larner. They

³⁹ ‘Good Counsell, to the Presbyterian Government...669 f.10[39]. Thomason dates the tract ‘November 1645’ and adds Chidley’s full surname after the printed initials ‘K.C.’.

⁴⁰ P Higgins, ‘The Reactions of Women...’, pp. 200, 204-205.

⁴¹ A Hughes, *Gender and the English Revolution*, pp. 54-61.

⁴² Anon, *A True Relation of all the Remarkable Passages, and Illegall Proceedings of some Sathannical or Doeg-like Accusers of their Brethern Against William Larner, A Free-man of England*. E335[7].

⁴³ *Every Mans Case*, 669 f.10[52].

were again printed together in a pamphlet.⁴⁴ In the same month, both John Lilburne and Elizabeth Lilburne were separately printing petitions demanding his freedom from imprisonment in Newgate.⁴⁵ Some weeks later Richard Overton, also from Newgate, was doing the same.⁴⁶

Overton organised a petition setting out the case for a far-reaching overhaul of government that came in the name of ‘the inhabitants of Buckinghamshire and Hartfordshire’. At the foot of the single printed page is a note ‘To the Reader’ which explains the process by which the petition was gathered and presented. The note tells us that ‘This petition was with almost ten thousand names, and was brought to Parliament on the 11 of February 1646 with about 500 Gentlemen and yeoman’. But this considerable delegation ‘did not find that fair access to Parliament that they expected’. Most of them then left London but they chose six ‘Commissioners’ to stay behind and try to get the petition read and answered but they ‘could not prevail.’ This failure was attributed to the fact that ‘those they had to deal with’ had ‘a greater affection for the House of Lords, then to the Liberties and Freedoms of those that choose and trusted them’. The Commissioners then ‘were forced in great discontent to return to their several dwellings, and truly to acquaint the rest of their fellow-Petitioners, what hard dealings they had found from the hands of the peoples great Trusties at Westminster’.⁴⁷

Mary Overton, like Ellen Larner, also issued a petition under her name. It recounts the forcible arrest of her husband and her own even more brutal arrest and imprisonment in the Bridewell. It complains ‘Petitions... are ordinarily slighted, scoffed and derided, even by members of your

⁴⁴ See *A Vindication of every Free-mans libertie...* which contains *To the Right Honourable, the Lords...the humble petition of Hellen Larner...*, (note that Ellen Larner’s first name is given as ‘Hellen’ in this second petition). Wing L445A.

⁴⁵ J. Lilburne, *A copy of a letter...* 669 f.10[62]. E. Lilburne, *To the Chosen and betruſted Knights, Citizens, and Burgeſſes...* 669 f.10[86].

⁴⁶ R. Overton, *To the High and Mighty States...*, 669 f.10[91].

⁴⁷ R. Overton, *To the right honourable, the betruſted...* 669 f.10[115]. The precise dating of this petition is a little difficult. The note to the reader says the original petition was presented on 11th February 1646 and Thomason’s hand-dated the reprint with the note as March 1646. These two dates are consistent with each other but not with the date of the 17th April 1646 which is given in the original petition in reference to an decision of Parliament of which the petitioners approve. Either this date is wrong or Thomason misdated his acquisition.

House'.⁴⁸ By November 1647 Thomas Prince and Samuel Chidley were also in prison at the Gate House for 'seditious and contemptuous avowing and prosecuting of a former Petition and paper annexed, stiled an agreement of the people'.⁴⁹ After all this there can be little surprise that defending the right to print freely and petition became central to Leveller propaganda. Often these demands would be contained in fresh petitions that protested the fate of earlier petitions and petitioners.⁵⁰

The Leveller Petition of March 1647 was circulated for subscription in and around London. When an informer alerted Parliament it charged a committee under Colonel Leigh to deal with the issue. On March 19th Leigh's committee was besieged by 'divers hundreds' of the petition's supporters who had to be ejected from the committee's chamber. They gathered nearby to hear the petition read aloud by Nicolas Tue, who was promptly arrested by the sergeant at arms. The petitioners returned on two subsequent occasions to protest this treatment. On the second occasion, on the 20th May, the House voted to have the petition burnt by the common hangman. More protests resulted. They were rebuffed and the Levellers issued a statement that they 'discharged themselves of further attendance for the present'. As Don Wolfe notes, 'In less than ten weeks the Levellers had appealed to the House *six* times, with four petitions, a certificate of avowal, and a statement virtually acknowledging their defeat through the normal course of appeal'.⁵¹ In 1647 William Walwyn wrote *Gold Tried in the Fire, or the Burnt Petitions Revived*, his protest at Parliament's decision to have the common hangman burn the March petition. Here he describes the Leveller's methods of petitioning: 'Divers printed coppies thereof being sent abroad to gain subscriptions, one whereof was intercepted by an Informer'.⁵²

⁴⁸ M Overton, *To the right Honourable, the Knights, Burgesses, the Parliament of England*..., dated by Thomason March 1646. E.381[10]. The authorship of this is attributed to Richard Overton, and although the passages on legal precedent point in this direction no reason is given for ruling out joint authorship. See B. J. Gibbons, 'Richard Overton', ODNB.

⁴⁹ Anon, *To the Supream Authority of England*.... 669 f.11[98].

⁵⁰ See, for instance, *To the Right Honourable, the Supreme Authority of this Nation*.... 669 f.13[73].

⁵¹ D Wolfe, *Leveller Manifestoes of the Puritan Revolution* (New York, Frank Cass, 1967) p. 134.

⁵² W Walwyn, *Gold Tried in the Fire*..., E392[19]. Also available in J. R. McMichael and B. Taft (eds.), *The Writings of William Walwyn* (Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 1989) pp. 275-293.

John Lilburne claimed in January 1648 that 30,000 copies of a Leveller petition were being printed for widespread distribution.⁵³ The same year opponents of the Levellers were complaining of their plans to print 3,000 copies of a petition. ‘If it be a petition to the House, why is it printed and published to the people, before presenting it to the House? Is it to get the approbation of the multitudes?’, they asked.⁵⁴ *The Remonstrance of Many Thousands of the Free-People of England...and those called Levelers* claimed this ‘is already signed by 98064 hands, and more to be added daily; so soon as we can give notice hereof to our afflicted Brethern in all the Counties of England and Wales’.⁵⁵ Lilburne claimed that two publications in 1649, the *Manifestation* and the *Agreement of the People* of 1st May, had a print run of 20,000 which were sent ‘gratis all over England’.⁵⁶ There were other petitions from other political currents which claimed large numbers of signatories. But the Levellers are alone in being an organised current that could repeatedly mass petition on this scale.

In March 1649 John Lilburne, William Walwyn, Richard Overton and Thomas Prince were ordered to be arrested by the House of Commons. The specific offense was that ‘Lt. Colonell Lilburne did read the Book called Englands new Chains discovered on Sunday last at Winchester House, before a great multitude of people and perswaded Subscriptions to it, and endeavoured to answer objections made against it.’⁵⁷ In April 1649 we get a glimpse of Leveller organisation from the *The Humble Petition of Divers wel-affected Women*, a plea to free Lilburne, Walwyn, Prince and Overton from their imprisonment in the Tower. The petition is printed and contains this instruction on its final page:

All those women that are Approvers hereof, are desired to subscribe it, and to deliver in their Subscriptions to the women which will be appointed in every Ward and

⁵³ G Masterson, *A Declaration of Some Proceedings of Lt. Col. John Lilburne...*, p. 17. E427[6].

⁵⁴ G Masterson, *A Declaration and some Proceedings...* Also see D Zaret, ‘Petitions and the “Invention” of Public Opinion in the English Revolution’, p. 1526.

⁵⁵ *The Remonstrance of Many Thousands of the Free-People of England...and those called Levelers*, p. 8. E574[15]. Although the figure of nearly 100,000 signatories is very high given a national population figure of less than 6 million.

⁵⁶ J Lilburne, *Apologetical Narration* (Amsterdam, 1652) p. 71.

⁵⁷ TNA: PRO, SP25/62 f.125.

Division to receive the same, and to meet at Westminster Hall upon the Munday 23 of this instant April 1649, betwixt 8 and 9 o'clock in the fore noon.⁵⁸

Clearly these printed copies were designed for circulation to gain signatures, then delivered to a network of organisers in the wards of the City, collated and delivered to Parliament. The women looked for support among the congregations at sectarian churches where '...in some places many signed, in other places none at all, and in some places it was disputed'. There were said to be 10,000 who did sign. Parliament refused to hear the petition and so the women both protested at Westminster and organised a second petition.⁵⁹

Lilburne himself comments on the effectiveness of the Levellers petitioning in his *To the Affectors and Approvers...of the London petition of the eleventh of September 1648*. Written from the Tower on 17th July 1649, he addresses 'my true friends...usually meeting at the Whalebone in Lothbury...commonly (but most unjustly) stiled Levellers'. Lilburne thanks his supporters for their petitioning for him 'when I was a prisoner in Newgate, about four years ago' and for their continued petitioning against his current imprisonment. But interestingly he also credits the petitioning campaign of the previous year with freeing him from prison: '...your effectual Petitioning for me last year...was the instrumental means of my deliverance out of almost three years of captivity'.⁶⁰

Lilburne and Wildman's meeting at Well Yard in Wapping in January 1648 was in part to discuss the tactics of petitioning. But it wasn't the only such meeting. On the 5th February the Derby House committee, with Oliver Cromwell present, issued orders to the Militia of London, Westminster, Tower Hamlets and Southwark asking them to take notice of 'many seditious and scandalous papers that have been contrived, printed and published...by John Lilburne and his associates'. The order continued 'we are certainly informed that there are frequent and set meetings within the City and places adjacent held for the promoting and carrying out of the ends advocated in these papers, and in some of these meetings things have been contrived and

⁵⁸ Anon, *To the Supream Authority of this Nation...The Humble Petition of Divers wel-affected Women*. E551[14].

⁵⁹ B Manning, *1649: The Crisis of the English Revolution* (London, Bookmarks, 1992) pp. 163-164.

⁶⁰ J Lilburne, *To all the Affectors and Approvers...of the London petition of the eleventh of September 1648*, Wing L2183A.

enacted tending to the raising of new troubles...'. The Militia were therefore required to 'find out and disperse all such meetings and put down all attempts to act upon these recommendations'.⁶¹

Petitions did not stand alone of course. They were reproduced in newsbooks. *The Moderate* regularly reproduced Leveller petitions, helped to organise support for them and reported on their fate.⁶² Leveller pamphlets reproduced petitions as well as elaborating the political positions they embodied and describing the actions taken in their support. The Leveller press was a powerful method of reproducing petitions, thus broadening their reach and deepening support for the views they expressed. Reproducing the petitions in *The Moderate* was a way of 'double petitioning'~once when the petition was collected, twice when its presentation and subsequent fate were reported. And the petitions themselves were frequently reproduced with the answers of parliament printed at the foot of the page. If petitions were refused then subsequent petitions would repeat their case and protest their dismissal.⁶³

And there were other forms of support. In July 1647 *The Humble Petition of the Well Affected Young Men and Apprentices of the City of London* was addressed to Sir Thomas Fairfax requesting that he intercede to oppose the formation of Militia in the City. This petition was supported by 'A congratulatory letter from the Agitators of the Army to the said petitioners'. The Agitators letter reveals that the petition was sent to them for their 'advice and approbation' and to be forwarded to Fairfax. The Agitators conclude by encouraging the apprentices 'to persevere in your good resolutions'. Among the signatories were Leveller William Allen and sometime ally Edmund Chillenden. Both the original petition and the Agitators' letter were printed together for distribution. In the same way the garrisons at Newcastle and Berwick both sent letters

⁶¹ TNA: PRO, SP 21/24 f. 9.

⁶² For example, at the height of the petitioning campaign in 1648 *The Moderate* was reproducing at least one, and usually more, petition in every issue. Petitions from Oxfordshire and Leicestershire are reported and reprinted in the *The Moderate* for 26 September-3 October 1648. E465[25]; from Army garrisons in *The Moderate* for 3 October-10 October 1648. E467[1]; from Newcastle and Hull in *The Moderate* for 10 October-17 October 1648. E468[2]; from Ireton's Regiment in *The Moderate* for 17 October-24 October 1648. E468[24].

⁶³ *Four Petitions to His Excellency Sir Thomas Fairfax*.... See p. 5. E393[7].

congratulating the organisers of the Levellers Large Petition of 11th September 1648. Again the two letters were printed together on a single sheet for distribution.⁶⁴

The dynamic of petitioning

Petitioning was a dynamic and highly contested practice from the early days of the revolution. Charles I issued an instruction to ‘print, publish and disperse’ a book called *A Collection of Sundry Petitions presented to the King* in May 1642. In the preface its anonymous editor is clear about those aspects of petitioning which Royalists disliked. Recalling the practice of Sparta, where anyone suggesting ‘innovations in government’ would appear with a rope or halter around his neck so that ‘his head paid the trespass of a new invented prejudice’, he writes:

...old women without Spectacles can discover Popish plots, young men and prentizes assume to regulate the Rebellion of *Ireland*, Sea-men and Mariners reform the House of Peers, Poore men, Porters and Labourers spy out a malignant party, and discipline them; the countrey clouted-shoe renew the decayed trade of the Citie. The Cobbler patch up Religion, & all these petition for a translation, both of Church and State, with so little fear of the Halter, that they would think themselves neglected, if they had not thanks for their care of the Re-publicke...⁶⁵

The purpose in collecting and printing these Royalist petitions was to counter the influence of popular petitions: ‘The question is whether battery, or defence will be stronger’. The Royalist petitions come from 14 towns and counties. Many open by complaining that previous petitions have misrepresented the views of the counties. The Huntington petition is one of the more explicit in its accusation that ‘diverse petitions... have been carried about to most places against the present form and frame of Church government, and Divine Service, or Common Prayers, and the hands of many persons of ordinary quality solicited to the same...’. It goes on to complain of petitions ‘spread amongst the Common people, the contents of many printed pamphlets swarming at London and all Countries, the Sermons preached publically in Pulpits,

⁶⁴ Anon, *A Copie of two Letters*.... 669 f.13[27].

⁶⁵ Sir Thomas Aston, *A Collection of Sundry Petitions*.... E150[28].

and other private places, and the bitter invectives divulged, and commonly spoken by many distracted persons, all of them showing extreme...dislike of the Government of the Church...' The editor hopes that 'This Collection of these many sleeping Petitions will show every county that the way is open' for greater Royalist opposition.⁶⁶

This pattern of 'cross-petitioning' was repeated at every stage of the revolution. Peace petitions were common during the first civil war, as were petitions for a more effective prosecution of the war. One London petition of December 1642, for instance, specifically proclaims that it is designed to counter a previous petition 'by some few Inhabitants of London not exceeding the number of a Hundred, against an Accommodation for Peace'. It contains an account showing exactly how contested the petitioning process could be. As the supporters of the petition were gathering support it was seized from them under a 'Warrant of the Lord Mayor' and one of their number was imprisoned. The next day when a group of the petitioners gathered in protest at the Guildhall they were broken up by a troop of cavalry, swords drawn. When the petitioners returned on a later date to try to convince the City Aldermen and the Common Council to support the petition some 20 soldiers, again with drawn swords, rushed them inside the Guildhall crying '*Let us destroy these Malignant Doggs that would have PEACE, let us cut the throats of these Papist rogues*'. The petitioners managed to disarm the soldiers and then closed the Guildhall doors against other soldiers outside. A troop of horse, swords and pistols in hand, then tried unsuccessfully to force the door. One of the petitioners was shot in the face through the keyhole of the door. Other petitioners outside the hall were attacked by the troopers. The petitioners were besieged for hours and though they called out to the Mayor and Aldermen for help 'a strange deafenesse possessed them, and the Petitioners remained remedylesse'. Meanwhile the soldiers outside brought up two cannon. The petitioners fled up to the Common Council chamber and forced their way in. They were then told they could leave in safety. But once outside they were 'pursued...with drawne Swords, and bitter execrations, many of the rude multitude taking advantage, did kicke, beate, reproach, and inhumanely abuse them, crying out, *hang them, cut their throates*'. One of the petitioners had to flee to the roof of a house and only

⁶⁶ Sir Thomas Aston, *A Collection of Sundry Petitions...*

escaped by 'leaping from one house top to another'.⁶⁷ He was luckier than some of the Independent petitioners who were the victims of more violence at the Guildhall in August 1647. Two of their number were killed when Reformadoes attacked them. They appealed to the Commons and, when they got no response, they petitioned Fairfax at Putney on the 8th October. He promised his support.⁶⁸

In response to the peace campaign of 1642-43 a petition was raised by radicals including Henry Marten for the formation of a Committee of the General Rising in order to put the conduct of the war on a more radical footing. The petition gained 20,000 signatures and was presented to Parliament by a group that included John Norbury, later a defender of those refusing to pay tithes and a close associate of William Walwyn and other Leveller leaders. Unsigned leaflets were strewn around the streets on at least two occasions requesting citizens to report to the Merchants Hall and the Grocers Hall to sign petitions in support of a general rising.⁶⁹ Marten spoke at a large meeting in the Common Hall in which he said 'the principle cause why this meeting was desired, was to communicate unto you, a Petition of many thousands of well affected persons of this Citie, and other parts of the Kingdome...'.⁷⁰

After the first civil war and through the period of the second civil war petitions for and against a Personal Treaty with the King competed to sway popular opinion. Leveller petitioning played a crucial role in this debate. Part of Thomas Edwards' concern in *Gangraena* was to undermine the anti-Presbyterian petitioning and pamphleteering of the future Levellers throughout 1646. He particularly cites the *Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens*.⁷¹ Leveller petitioning in 1647 was partly a response to the push by the Presbyterians, in the wake of the expulsion of 11 of their supporters from the Commons, to prevent an Independent ascendancy. The Venetian court was sent reports which recorded that 'The Presbyterians... have incited the apprentices of London

⁶⁷ Anon, *The Humble Petition and Remonstrance of Divers Citizens*.... E83[22].

⁶⁸ Anon, *Two Petitions From the City of London*.... E.410[20]. Thomason wrote 'both abominably false' on the cover, but that may have been his Presbyterian sympathy with Lord Mayor and an Alderman, who were accused of starting the attack on the petitioners, not a denial that fighting took place.

⁶⁹ I Gentles, 'Parliamentary Politics and the Politics of the Street: The London Peace Campaigns of 1642-3' in *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 26, part 2 (2007) pp. 150-152.

⁷⁰ *Three Speeches delivered at a Common-hall* (London, 1643), p. 17. The other two speakers were the Earl of Manchester and John Pym.

⁷¹ T Edwards, *Gangraena*, pt. III (London, 1646) p. 195.

to present a petition to the Council of the city... so that the king may return to it upon the terms which he himself proposed on the 12th May'. The Independents in the Commons denounced the petitioners as traitors whereupon 'the apprentices, incited by the Presbyterians' then 'proceeded to parliament, to the number of 10,000, with the two sheriffs of London, and presenting the same petition they obtained... the withdrawal of the decree declaring them rebels'. For good measure they forced the Speaker to 'shout God save the King'. After this the House tried to rise 'but the people threatening to set fire to them they were compelled to resolve that the king might come to London whenever he pleased'.⁷² It was this action which brought the New Model Army to London, led over London Bridge by the regiment of the soon-to-be Leveller hero Thomas Rainsborough. David Underdown detects the beginnings of the division between Levellers and Independents that would become so obvious at Putney later in the year to the petitions of March 1647.⁷³

Conflicting petitions were also at the heart of the political crisis that attended the Second Civil War. Robert Ashton has examined the well over a hundred petitions that were received by Parliament between the Vote of No Addresses and Prides Purge, that is between January and December 1648. He records that 'during the spring and summer, if there is one theme which predominates and characterizes more petitions than any other, it was the request for a Treaty with the king with a view to a final settlement of the kingdom'.⁷⁴ In May 1648 Parliament felt under such pressure from petitioners that it declared that henceforward 'No petitions to be brought up by more than 20 persons'.⁷⁵ For Henry Marten the Second Civil War 'begins with petitioning' as 'the Counties of Bucks, Surrey, Essex, and Kent, ply the Parliament with

⁷² From: 'Venice: August 1647', *Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice*, Vol. 28: 1647-1652 (1927), pp. 5-12.

⁷³ D Underdown, "'Honest" Radicals in the Counties, 1642-1649' in D Pennington and K Thomas (eds.), *Puritans and Revolutionaries* (Oxford, OUP, 1978) p. 194.

⁷⁴ R Ashton, *Counter-Revolution, The Second Civil War and its Origins, 1646-8* (New Haven, Yale, 1994) pp. 132-139.

⁷⁵ *Bibliotheca Lindesiana, A Bibliography of Royal Proclamations of the Tudor and Stuart Sovereigns, Vol. I, England and Wales* (Oxford, 1910) p. 335, No. 2765.

Malignant Petitions'.⁷⁶ But by the autumn of 1648 both army and civilian petitions against the Treaty became more numerous.

The Levellers Large Petition was important in turning the tide. Its influence on other petitions was considerable. As Ashton notes, 'Beginning with the radical petition of 11 September from some self-styled well-affected persons of London and finding further expression on 13 September in the Oxfordshire petition denouncing those who "cry *Peace, Peace*, but seek after *Blood*", and those in October from Leicestershire, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, York and Somerset, the petitions now holding the stage are those seeking to abort the Treaty and demanding the bringing of delinquents to justice'.⁷⁷ In early October *Mercurius Pragmaticus* recorded of one group of petitioners:

It being resolved by them (all as one man) to come and petition their friends in the House, in persuance of the Levellers Large Petition; as appears by severall Petitionary Letters (preparatory to their design) which they have sent up out of the North to the Generall, to invite him to joyne with them, and another gratulatory Letter to the presenters of the Large Petition.⁷⁸

We can gauge something of the impact of the Large Petition, and how innovative the Levellers approach seemed to contemporaries, from a pamphlet designed to refute the Large Petition and issued just a week later. *A Full Answer to the Levellers Petition* opens with a critique of its claim to be a petition at all. The Levellers, says the anonymous author, call it a petition 'whereas there is nothing therein petitioned'. And they call it a 'humble' petition, 'where as it is extreme saucie, and Schismatical; saucie, reproving the King & the Lower House thorowout: Schismatical, in directing that which they so call a *Petition*, not to the *Parliament of England*, nor to the *two Houses*, but to the *Right Honourable the Commons of England Assembled in Parliament* (altogether leaving out the upper House)...and now the Levellers will have a *Parliament without an upper House, and all made fellows at football*'. Here, of course, the Levellers critic understood them accurately. They were

⁷⁶ H Marten, *A Word to Mr. Wil. Prynn Esq; and Two for the Parliament and the Army*..., p. 12. E.537[16].

⁷⁷ R. Ashton, *Counter-Revolution*, p. 157.

⁷⁸ *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, Number 28, 3-10 October 1648, E466[11].

indeed using the petition as a manifesto and they were deliberately leaving out the upper House. Interestingly, however, there is no denial that the petition has the support of ‘thousands’.⁷⁹

Norah Carlin’s systematic analysis of the 1648 petitioning campaign makes some important points.⁸⁰ She notes that ‘the sixty-four which survive are all different. Though many state their support for the London Levellers’ 11 September petition, widely recognised as having inspired the others, they either express this agreement in general terms or select their own preferred demands, often adding local or regional issues’.⁸¹ Carlin goes on to argue that although ‘there must have been some co-ordination and encouragement from Independent and Leveller leaders in London, parliament and the army, if only to supply provincial petitioners with news...these were no “parrot petitions”’.⁸²

This is as we would expect if we adopt the dialectical model of the relationship between a radicalising constituency and a radical organisation. The mainspring of radicalisation was the incompatibility of the forces contending the Second Civil War, not primarily a result of agitation by the Levellers or the Independents. But this agitation did shape the way in which the incompatibility between these forces would be resolved. It gave the radical views arising from direct experience a particular ideological shape and an organised political form. And in doing so it assisted in making these views, rather than those that wanted, or would have acquiesced in, a Treaty with the King, predominant.

Both Ashton and Carlin point to the novelty of many petitioners, civilian as well as military, addressing themselves to the army rather than to Parliament.⁸³ This marked a breakdown in the belief that Parliament could or would remedy the petitioners concerns. Carlin argues that ‘the soldiers’ petitions are not primarily about bread-and-butter issues...their priority is bringing the king and others to justice’. It might be added that even where the petitions do deal with ‘bread and butter issues’ these are directly connected with the largest political questions facing the

⁷⁹ Anon, *A Full Answer to the Levellers Petition*.... Wing F2343, p. 1.

⁸⁰ N Carlin, ‘Petitions and Revolution in England, September 1648-January 1649’. I am extremely grateful to Norah Carlin for letting me read this unpublished study.

⁸¹ N Carlin, ‘Petitions and Revolution in England’, p. 7-8.

⁸² N Carlin, ‘Petitions and Revolution in England’, p. 8.

⁸³ R Ashton, *Counter-Revolution*, pp. 128-132. N Carlin, ‘Petitions and Revolution in England’, p. 11.

nation. So the issue of 'free-quarter' which is raised again and again in regimental petitions was seen by petitioners as not just important in itself. They were also concerned that Parliament was using the issue to turn the general population against the Army, that the issue was being used politically. The petition of Hewson's regiment saw 'a renewed design upon this Army, by forcing us to free quarter, still to make us the contempt and hissing of the people'.⁸⁴ Similarly on the issue of arrears in pay: the sentiment of the petitions no longer seems to be simply that the Parliament must address this issue, but reflects a growing mood that this issue will not be addressed until there is a fundamental transformation in the political situation which involves a final settlement of the nation. The sentiment among many soldiers seems to have been that the most elementary of demands could not be gained without a fundamentally different political regime being attained.

Carlin sees 'circumstantial evidence for a significant level of political awareness' in the fact that 13 of the 16 regiments petitioning had been involved in the army agitation of 1647 and five were to take part in the disturbances of 1649. Some 11 of the soldiers' petitions are supportive of the Levellers Large Petition.⁸⁵ This supports the analysis of Ian Gentles. Looking at the shorter time period of the 10th October until mid-November, Gentles finds that Army headquarters received petitions from nine New Model Army regiments, the Northern Brigade and 'several regiments' in the west of England and that 'Five of these petitions explicitly supported the Leveller programme'.⁸⁶ And at least one petition, although it does not explicitly mention support for the Levellers Large Petition, reproduces its demands so extensively that it is likely that it was influenced by it.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ T. Fairfax, *Two petitions Presented to His Excellency the Lord Fairfax...by the Officers and Soldiers commanded by Colonel Hewson* (London, 1648). E473[23].

⁸⁵ N Carlin, 'Petitions and Revolution in England', p20. Although it is not clear whether this figure of 11 petitions supportive of the Levellers relates to the total of 16 regimental petitions or to the total of 29 regimental and garrison petitions. Either way it doesn't seem to justify Carlin's passing remark that Leveller agitation 'had a limited role in politicizing the army at this stage', especially as not all influence will have resulted in explicit declarations of support in petitions.

⁸⁶ I Gentles, *The New Model Army in England, Ireland and Scotland, 1645-1653* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1992) pp. 271, 267-268.

⁸⁷ T Fairfax, *The Declarations and Humble representations of the Officers and Soldiers in Colonel Scroops, Colonel Sanders and Col. Wautons Regiment* (London 1648) pp. 4-5. E475[24]. The Petition of Wauton's regiment is the one which reproduces the demands of the Levellers petition.

In this context it is worth noting one remarkable petition in which there is a glimpse of the continuity between the Leveller agitation of 1647 and the petitioning wave of the second half of 1648. In April 1648 some regiments began to organise Agitators to propagate a new petition whose demands were closely modelled on the *Agreement of the People*.⁸⁸ Having drawn up the petition ‘some met at St Albans about the 24 April, and Colonell Riches Regiment chose one of every Troop to meet there and give them an account of their proceedings...’.⁸⁹ But as the meeting was taking place some ‘Officers rushed violently into the place, where they were met, and imprisoned all their persons.’ The organisation behind the petition however was sufficiently strong to reproduce the petition and to preface it with a detailed account of the rise of the Agitators in 1647 and of the Officers attempts to suppress them up to and including the mutiny at Ware. They also attached a second petition from soldiers in Rich’s regiment demanding that their Agitators be freed from prison. A final postscript to the printed version is a plea to support the right of ordinary troopers to petition without the sanction of their officers.

We should also note, and neither Carlin nor Ashton put enough emphasis on this, that a very large percentage of the petitions direct their anger at the pro-Treaty elements in Parliament.⁹⁰ Carlin finds that some petitions made a direct call for Charles to pay for the blood spilt in the civil war, but she makes a different argument than that made by Patricia Crawford in her widely cited article ‘Charles Stuart, That Man of Blood’. Crawford argues that, ‘The question was...what should be done about the Lord’s evident wrath for the nation’s blood guiltiness. Thus blood guilt could be used... as a respectable device in propaganda for convincing people that something had to be done about Charles’.⁹¹ But only a minority of petitions raise the question of blood spilt in this manner. More frequent are references in the context of ‘suffering than in that of guilt’ as in the case of Fleetwood’s regiment who expected ‘some satisfaction for their services and former losses... of so much blood and treasure’.⁹² The petition’s first demand

⁸⁸ Anon, *The Armies Petition or A New Engagement of the Army, Who are yet Faithfull to the People...* (collected by Thomason, 3 May 1648). E348[1].

⁸⁹ *The Armies Petition or A New Engagement of the Army...*

⁹⁰ *A Petition From Severall Regiments of the Army...* (London, 1648). E470[32].

⁹¹ See P Crawford, ‘Charles Stuart, That Man of Blood’ *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Spring, 1977) p. 45.

⁹² N Carlin, ‘Petitions and Revolution in England’, p. 18.

was that ‘speedy and impartiall Justice may be executed upon all the formentors, and contrivers, and actors in the first and late war’. Its second demand was ‘that inquisition be made for the blood of Col. Rainsborough’.⁹³ But however we interpret the demand for blood vengeance it was at this stage inextricably linked with the notion of bringing justice to those who had caused the Second Civil War. *The Moderate* reprinted the petition of Overton’s regiment, then garrisoned at Berwick, arguing ‘That in the distribution of Justice, neither King, Lords, or any such persons be exempted from being proceeded against according to their demerits...’.⁹⁴

What is clear is that the Leveller petitioning campaign in 1648 was the largest the organisation had mounted, that it reached deep into the army, that it was effective in turning the tide against pro-Treaty petitions, and that it made the Levellers essential allies of the Independents in the final conflict with Charles I.

The importance of petitioning for the Levellers

The original supplicatory form of petitioning never died out. It remained part of what has been described as the ‘petitioning society’ in which nearly every major attempt at change, from the smallest individual issue to great matters of state, was the subject of a petition. Handwritten petitions and petitions for specific or individual redress persisted under the Commonwealth. On 16 September 1650, for instance, the Countess of Arundell wrote by hand to Cromwell petitioning to ‘free my small estate from sequestration’ and reminded him that he had been ‘pleased to recommend my petition to Colonel Martin and some others...’.⁹⁵ She was far from being the only Royalist woman petitioner.⁹⁶ Samuel Chidley wrote by hand to Cromwell about

⁹³ T Fairfax, *A Petition From Severall Regiments of the Army...* (London, 1648). E470[32] reproduced in *The Moderate*, No. 18, Tuesday November 7 to Tuesday November 14, (London, 1648).

⁹⁴ *The humble Petition of the Officers of Colonell Overtons Regiment, now in the garrison of Berwick* (London, 1648). E473[3]. See also *The Moderate*, No. 19, Tuesday November 14 to Tuesday November 21, 1648.

⁹⁵ Society of Antiquaries, MS. 138 f.29, Letters, petitions, etc., addressed to Oliver Cromwell, 1650-1654[printed in J Nickolls (ed.), *Original Letters and Papers of State, Addressed to Oliver Cromwell; Concerning the Affairs of Great Britain. From the Year MDCXLIX to MDCLVIII. Found among the Political Collections of Mr. John Milton* (London, 1743)].

⁹⁶ See, for instance, A Button, ‘Royalist Women Petitioners in South West England, 1655-62’ (University of the West of England) available at www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/uploads/docs/150053.pdf

religious governance.⁹⁷ He too was far from alone. A flood of handwritten petitions about post-revolutionary church government, many with multiple signatures, came to Cromwell from all corners of the nation.⁹⁸ But a new form and a new meaning for petitions did emerge in the years before the revolution.

The Levellers were the beneficiaries of this innovation even though it preceded their existence. The Puritan attempts at Church reformation were perhaps the first to begin transforming the petition into an overtly political and popular tool. As Nigel Smith notes, by the mid-century, the influence of printed sermons was immense.⁹⁹ Long before the Levellers became an identifiable movement the business of petitioning was linked to preaching and the activities of church congregations. In 1640 there were reports of a paper entitled *Advice tending to Reformation* about which it was said that ‘several petitions, signed with as many hands of every sort as can be procured’ are being supported by ministers who ‘stir up the people to desire or liking of reformation...’.¹⁰⁰

The Parliamentary opposition to Charles I accomplished a further transformation which combined the printing of petitions and the mass mobilisation which accompanied their presentation to inaugurate a new era in the use of petitions. The future Leveller leaders were part of these developments, but not yet in the form of a distinct organisation. Later, when the Parliamentary leaders attempted to suppress Leveller petitions, the Levellers repeatedly pointed out that they were only doing what Parliamentary leaders had first sanctioned. Edward Sexby and 26 ‘chosen agitators on behalf of the army’ made this point in June 1647 when they wrote,

We were oppressed and had a way prepared by Parliament in such cases...(to wit) by way of Petition, not imagining that we should have been blamed for...doing that which

⁹⁷ Society of Antiquaries, MS. 138 f.100, 109-110, Letters, petitions, etc., addressed to Oliver Cromwell, 1650-1654.

⁹⁸ Society of Antiquaries, MS. 138 f.219, 223, 227, 232, Letters, petitions, etc., addressed to Oliver Cromwell, 1650-1654.

⁹⁹ N Smith, ‘Non-conformist voices and books’, in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, Vol. IV, 1557-1695 (Cambridge, CUP, 2002) p. 415.

¹⁰⁰ TNA: PRO, SP 16/470 f. 180.

we were allowed and directed to in case of Parliament. But thus it was... we are declared Enemies of the State...¹⁰¹

As the Levellers drew together as an organisation they did so partly as a result of their use of petitions. As Smith notes, 'the religious radicals who launched themselves as a kind of popular political party (the Levellers) formulated an identity through the printed word~the currency that united their meetings'.¹⁰² And as they became an organisation they further transformed the use of petitions. To begin with the Levellers petitioned where others had done: in the streets, taverns and churches. We have seen the Leveller women working among Church congregations and we know that the Levellers scattered their petitions in the streets.¹⁰³ But as the Army became a key force in politics the Levellers, many of whom were themselves soldiers, fused their petitioning practice with that spontaneously arising in the Army itself. This gave the petitions greater direction, homogeneity and organisation than they would otherwise have had. It also linked radicals in the army with civilians in a way which would not have happened otherwise.

The Levellers' pursuit of a radical solution to the political crisis meant that they altered the focus of their petitions over time. At first they petitioned Parliament as a whole. Then they petitioned only the Commons as the more popularly accountable House. Then they petitioned Fairfax and the officers of the Army, because 'the petitions of the free-born Nation have been rejected by those which we have entrusted for the receiving of them, yea ordered burnt by the common hangman'.¹⁰⁴ And with ever-increasing force these petitions carried the idea that sovereignty lay with the people. All of this was innovative, as we have seen their critics were

¹⁰¹ Bod., Tanner MSS. 58/201, 'The Agitators to the Masters of Trinity House...18 June 1647'.

¹⁰² N Smith, 'Non-conformist voices and books', p. 420.

¹⁰³ As Thomason's handwritten note records on the title page of Edward Sexby, *A Copy of a Letter Sent by the Agents of severall Regiments* in November 1647. E.413[18]. See also D Wolfe, *Leveller Manifestoes of the Puritan Revolution*, p. 61.

¹⁰⁴ Anon, *Four petitions to his Excellency Sir Thomas Fairfax...* (London, 1647). E393[7]. All four petitions from inhabitants of Essex, Norfolk, Buckingham and Hertford make the same point.

quick to point out. One of them complained: 'A petition is to *set forth* your grievances, and not to *give a rule* to the Legislative Powers'. But that is just what the Levellers intended.¹⁰⁵

The process of petitioning was instrumental in developing the Leveller organisation in a number of ways. Petitions needed to be written and the process of writing was often collaborative and collective. *The Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens* of July 1646, often cited as the founding document of the Levellers, was most probably the joint work of Richard Overton, William Walwyn and Henry Marten.¹⁰⁶ But many other Leveller petitions and pamphlets were also jointly written. This helped give a common pattern of work and a degree of homogeneity to Leveller thought, although there were still clearly variations within the common platform. Derek Hirst has observed that 'The Levellers' discovery of the sovereignty of the people impelled them to make particular use of the mass, and therefore, printed petition'.¹⁰⁷ But the reverse is also true: the Levellers use of mass, printed petitions impelled them to stress the sovereignty of the people.

Leveller petitions were overwhelmingly printed petitions, although there are some hand-written Leveller petitions from the Commonwealth period.¹⁰⁸ Printing was a politically dangerous task that required collective organisation and trust. When it resulted in imprisonment further organisation and further petitioning was necessary to try to free those who were jailed. This imparted the necessity of continuous and systematic organisational work. Petitions needed to reflect the views of the rank and file of the Leveller movement and of a broader constituency beyond them. The meetings held in taverns and other locations were necessary for the purpose of 'answering scruplers', among others.¹⁰⁹ This too imparted a need for systematic organisation, money-raising and so on. The dissemination of petitions required the same. So did the demonstrations which accompanied the presentation of the petitions.

¹⁰⁵ G Masterson, *A Declaration of Some Proceedings of Lt. Col. John Lilburne...* p. 40. E427[6].

¹⁰⁶ See D Wolfe, *Leveller Manifestoes of the Puritan Revolution*, p. 111. Also H Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution* (Nottingham, Spokesman, 1961) pp. 96-97 and p. 138 n. 1.

¹⁰⁷ D Hirst, 'Making Contact: Petitions and the English Republic', *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 45; No. 1 (2006) p. 39.

¹⁰⁸ See E Porter, 'A Cloak for Knavery: Kingship, the Army and the First Protectorate Parliament 1654-55' (RMIT University, Melbourne) p. 193. Available at <http://www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/uploads/docs/170187.pdf>

¹⁰⁹ J Harris, *A Lash for a Lyar...* (London, 1648). E428[8].

In this context David Underdown challenges the assumption of many historians that ‘the men who led England into revolution had no effectively organised body of lay support: no “party” of their own’. He points out that although we know a lot about the ‘first revolution’ of 1640-42 and about the ‘revolution which failed’ after 1649 it is the ‘second revolution~the crisis of 1648-49~which remains obscure’. His identification of the ‘Honest’ party of Independents and Levellers is important, but he makes too little of the decisive effect that the Levellers, despite their relatively narrow base of support, had on this alliance, especially in 1648. When events hang in the balance, as they did in 1648, even a relatively small weight on one side of the scales can be critical.¹¹⁰

One way of tracing the Levellers’ contribution to the revolution is to examine their petitioning activity. Of course the impact of the petitions varied considerably. Some were turned aside by the authorities, though even these would have the limited effect of organising and mobilising Leveller supporters. Some will have achieved the goal of increasing the circulation of Leveller ideas even if they did not alter the direction of national politics. But the most effective of all was the Large Petition of 11th September 1648, which is why Leveller petitions for many months after refer to it. The Large Petition did indeed spark a much wider petitioning campaign which both shaped and magnified the popular mood against a Treaty with Charles at just the point where it looked as if the counter-revolution might find enough popular support to become hegemonic. This petition campaign, including that within the New Model Army, helped to make the Levellers into allies the Independents could not ignore and so gave them a crucial role in the political bloc that achieved the final victory of the revolution.

¹¹⁰ D Underdown, “‘Honest’ Radicals in the Counties, 1642-1649” in D Pennington and K Thomas (eds.), *Puritans and Revolutionaries* (Oxford, OUP, 1978) pp. 186-187, 204-205.

Chapter 5

Leveller organisation and the death of Rainsborough

On two occasions within five days in February 1648 the House of Commons declared that £100 would be given to anyone who ‘shall discover the Author, or Printer’ of ‘the vile blasphemous’ pamphlet which pretended to be ‘the New Testament’ of the House of Commons and the supreme Council of the New Model Army. The second vote also instructed the Sheriffs of London and Middlesex that the pamphlet was to be ‘seized, and collected together’ and then ‘burnt by the Hands of the common Hangman the next Week, in three of the most publick Places of *London* and *Westminster*, upon a Market Day’.¹¹¹ The Commons’ ire is understandable given the content of the pamphlet:

Good Lord, confound King Oliver,
And all his holy crew.
With Rainsborow, that leveller
and Pride that precious Jew

Let say once more, we do thee pray
Into a saw-pit fall.
Let Martin purge his pox away
Within some hospital

¹¹¹ *House of Commons Journal*, Volume 5, 19 February 1648 and 23 February 1648.

Let Hammon have his brains knock't out
 With his own bunch of keys.
 Let Walton and his zealous rout
 Visit the Hebridies

Let the two Houses fight and scratch
 Like wives at Billingsgate;
 And let them ne'er a peace up patch
 Until it be too late

That so upon each House of clay
 King Charles may mount his throne
 Hear us (O Father) we thee pray:
 Our hopes in thee alone.¹¹²

Perhaps the Parliamentary authorities were concerned that the verse accurately captured the political situation in which the King hoped to use divisions among supporters of Parliament to regain his full authority. Moreover it identified the main enemies of the King as 'that leveller' Thomas Rainsborough, Henry Marten, Thomas Pride and Cromwell. In this the pamphlet is at variance with the views of some modern historians who have been less willing to acknowledge importance of the critical nexus involving radical Independents and Levellers.¹¹³ Specifically they do not see the Levellers as effective actors in this phase of the revolution. This chapter will attempt to show, through an examination of the events surrounding the death and funeral of

¹¹² 'Ecce! Or the New testament of our lords and Saviours, the house of Commons and the Supreme Councel at Windsor', Somers Tracts 7. 61, in E Peacock, 'Transcripts and Notes largely concerning Thomas Rainborowe', John Rylands University Library, Civil War Collections, English MS. 235.

¹¹³ 'Radical' is used in the sense defended by Philip Baker as 'the notion of fundamental change...as a phenomena, therefore, radicalism was not concerned with the process of superficial reform or amendment'. See P Baker, 'Rhetoric, Reality and Varieties of Civil War Radicalism' in J Adamson, *The English Civil War* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) p. 203.

Thomas Rainsborough, that Leveller organisation was an important contributor to the political outcome of 1648.

Leveller organization in early 1648

We can see something of the state of Leveller organisation in the year of Rainsborough's funeral from the accounts of a meeting in Wapping in January 1648. On the 17th January, John Lilburne and John Wildman addressed a Leveller meeting in the area where the Rainsborough family lived. The meeting was called to promote a petition. Lilburne had been invited to the meeting 'by some friends' in order to answer the scruples and objections that 'some honest people, in or about Wappin' had concerning the petition.¹¹⁴

George Masterson, a Presbyterian minister from Shoreditch parish, attended the meeting. Masterson was there to spy. The following day he denounced the meeting as a traitorous conspiracy to both the Lords and Commons. On 19th January Masterson, Lilburne and Wildman all gave evidence at the bar of the House of Commons. Lilburne was immediately committed to the Tower and Wildman to the Fleet prison. Both were charged with treason. On 20th January Masterson gave evidence again to the Committee of Both Houses sitting at Derby House. Masterson published his evidence as a pamphlet on 10th February and the same material was published by the government at about the same time.¹¹⁵ William Clarke wrote to Leveller supporter Lieutenant-Colonel John Rede in Poole that the arrests caused 'disatisfaction in divers of the Honest Godly Partie'.¹¹⁶

Lilburne and Wildman hotly contested Masterson's charge of treason but, as Norah Carlin has shown, the picture that emerges from Masterson's account of the Wapping meeting, and Lilburne and Wildman's responses gives us our most detailed picture of how the Levellers and

¹¹⁴ J Lilburne, *An Impeachment for High Treason against Oliver Cromwell and his son in law Henry Ireton Esquires* (London, 1649). E568[20].

¹¹⁵ W Haller and G Davies, *The Leveller Tracts 1647-53* (New York, Peter Smith, 1944) pp88-89. See also N Carlin, 'Leveller Organization in London', *The Historical Journal*, 27, 4 (1984) pp. 955-960.

¹¹⁶ BL, Stowe MS. 189 f.39-40. Also A R Bayley, *The Great Civil War in Dorset* (Taunton, Wessex Press, 1910) p.330

their supporters organized.¹¹⁷ It is these methods which interest us here since they are likely to have been employed again to promote Rainsborough's funeral procession which wound its way to the same place 10 months later. Masterson records part of Lilburne's speech as saying:

That the People of London had appointed ten or twelve of their Commissioners (whereof he said that Lilburn was one) though he said likewise, that the honest Blades in Southwark did not like the word Commissioners. These Commissioners were appointed to promote the Petition, and send out Agents to every City, Towne, and Parish, (if they could possibly) of every County of the Kingdome, to inform the people of their Liberties and Priviledges...¹¹⁸

Masterson also gives us Lilburne's account of where and how often these Commissioners met. Wapping seems to have been a base for Leveller activity:

Lieutenant Col. Lilburne told them, That they (the Commissoners) had their constant meetings on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays in the evening at the Whalebone; and the other three days at Southwark, Wapping, and other places, with their friends; and that upon the next Lords day they were to meet at Dartfort in Kent, to receive an account of their Agents, (from Gavesend, Maidstone, and the most choice Townes of the County)...¹¹⁹

The Whalebone inn was close by the route of Rainsborough's funeral procession. Lilburne continued his speech, according to Masterson, by 'drawing a Paper-Book from under his short Red Coat' and giving the meeting a summary of the letters that had been sent out to the 'well-affected' around the country encouraging them to promote the petition. Lilburne also reported to the meeting that 30,000 of the petitions were to come from the printing presses the following day. The Levellers' supporters and friendly soldiers would help get them around the country.

¹¹⁷ N Carlin, 'Leveller Organization in London', especially pp. 958-960.

¹¹⁸ *A Declaration and Some Proceedings*, E427[6], and also W Haller and G Davies, *The Leveller Tracts 1647-53*, p. 98.

¹¹⁹ *A Declaration and Some Proceedings*, W Haller and G Davies, *The Leveller Tracts 1647-53*, p. 100.

One Lazarus Tindall of Colonel Barkstead's regiment was ready to take 1,000 copies for the use of the soldiers.¹²⁰ To fund this work, Lilburne told the meeting, money needed to be raised:

That because the businesse needs must be a work of charge... they had therefore appointed Treasurers, namely Mr. Prince and Mr. Chidly, and others, and Collectors (whose names as I remember, he did not reade) who should gather up from those that acted for them, of some two pence, three pence, six pence, a shilling, two shillings, half a Crown a week...¹²¹

It is some indication of the scale on which the Levellers were operating at this time that 30,000 petitions were being printed: this would be a substantial number for a contemporary political campaign designed to reach a population more than ten times greater than 5.2 million of mid 17th century England.¹²²

Masterson's account of Lilburne's speech is corroborated by the letter that Lilburne, Wildman, John Davies and Richard Woodward sent to the 'well affected' of Kent. The letter contains some fairly precise suggestions on the way the well affected of Kent should organize:

...for the more effectuall proceedings in this bussinesse, there is a Method and Order settled in all the Wards of London, and the out Parishes and Suburbs; they have appointed severall active men in every Ward and Division, to be a Committee, to take speciall care of the busninesse, and to appoint active men in every Parish to read the Petition at set meetings for that purpose, and to take Subscriptions, and to move as many as can possibly, to goe in person when the day of delivering it shall be appointed; and that they intend to give notice of that time to all the adjacent Counties, that as many as possibly can, may also joyne with them the same day...¹²³

¹²⁰ P Gregg, *Free-Born John* (London, Dent, 1961) p. 231.

¹²¹ *A Declaration and Some Proceedings*, W Haller and G Davies, *The Leveller Tracts 1647-53*, pp. 100-101.

¹²² The figure of 5.2 million is for 1646. See E A Wrigley and R S Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871* (London, Edward Arnold, 1981) Table 7.8, pp. 208-209

¹²³ *A Declaration and Some Proceedings*, W Haller and G Davies, *The Leveller Tracts 1647-53* p. 103.

The petitioning and the assembly to present it was, the letter continued, to be promoted in the counties of Hertfordshire, Buckingham, Oxford, Cambridge and Rutland among others. The Leveller leaders urged their supporters in Kent to use ‘the same Method, as the best expedient for your union’.¹²⁴

Another source of information about Leveller organization at this time is Lilburne’s transcription of his own speech at the bar of the House of Commons on 19th January 1648. This transcript formed part of Lilburne’s pamphlet *An Impeachment for High Treason against Oliver Cromwell and his son in law Henry Ireton Esquires* published 18 months later, on the 10th August 1649. Lilburne told the Speaker that:

as soon as I and some of my true and faithful Comrades had caused some thousands of that Petition printed, I did the best I could to set up constant meetings in severall places in Southwark to promote the Petition; to which meetings all scruplers and objectors against any thing contained in the Petition, might repair for satisfaction...¹²⁵

Lilburne confirms that he then set about appointing ‘Trustees in every parish’ to ‘take especial care to promote the Petition effectually and vigourously’. Once this was done a co-ordinating committee was set up at a meeting at the Whalebone: ‘we chuse out a Committee, or a certaine number of faithful understanding men...to withdraw into the next roome, to forme a method, how to promote it in every Ward in the City, and out-parishes, and also in every County in the Kingdome’.¹²⁶

Lilburne goes on to confirm Masterson’s information about the appointment of treasurers and the collection of dues at rates of between 2 pence and half a Crown a week. This was ‘to pay for the Printing of the Petitions, and the bearing of the charges of those messengers we should have occasion to send downe into the Countries to our friends...’. Lilburne also confirms that he sent letters to friends in Buckinghamshire, and Hertfordshire, as well as to Kent.

¹²⁴ *A Declaration and Some Proceedings*, W Haller and G Davies, *The Leveller Tracts 1647-53* pp. 103-104.

¹²⁵ J Lilburne, *An Impeachment for High Treason* (London, 1649) E568[20]. See also N Carlin, ‘Leveller Organisation in London’, pp. 959-960.

¹²⁶ J Lilburne, *An Impeachment for High Treason* (London, 1649).

The picture of the Levellers that emerges is one of sustained, methodical, widespread political organization. No doubt the same methods that Lilburne describes the Levellers using in January were used in July to gain the 10,000 names for the petition to free Lilburne from the Tower and, in August and September, to gain 40,000 signatories for the Large Petition and to organise the turnout on the demonstrations at Westminster which accompanied its presentation.¹²⁷ It is likely that these networks were used in the preparation of Rainsborough's funeral. Indeed it is hard to see how the scale of mobilization and its organized character could have been achieved without the kind of effort that Lilburne describes. The prior announcement of the funeral in the Leveller press, the political arguments designed to mobilize support for it, the route of the procession, the impact of the funeral sermon, all point to this conclusion.

The Levellers and the political situation before the death of Rainsborough

On 1st August 1648 the Second Civil War was still raging when the Levellers delivered to Parliament a petition for the release of John Lilburne from the Tower. It was signed by 10,000 people.¹²⁸ On the day the petition was read and the House then voted that 'the Order of Restraint of Colonel John Lilbourne be taken off, and discharged'. The Lords agreed the following day and Lilburne walked free.¹²⁹

The Presbyterians in Parliament had their reasons for freeing Lilburne. They thought, given his animosity toward Cromwell, that his liberty would work to their advantage. But Lilburne refused to act against Cromwell.¹³⁰ Instead, he initiated the period of closest co-operation between the Independents and the Levellers. Lilburne immediately turned his hand to agitation against those in the Army high command and the Parliament who were aiming at a Treaty with

¹²⁷ J Frank, *The Levellers, A History of the Writings of Three Seventeenth Century Social Democrats John Lilburne, Richard Overton, William Walwyn* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1955) p. 167.

¹²⁸ *To the Honourable the Commons of England assembled in parliament. The Humble petition of divers thousands of well-affected Citizens, and others in behalf of Lieutenant Collonel John Lilburne, Prisoner of the Tower of London* (London 1648). The front piece of this petition records that it was 'presented the first of August 1648, with above 10,000 hands thereunto subscribed...' E457[19]. See also J Frank, *The Levellers*, p. 163 and p. 314 n. 85. See also H Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution* (Nottingham, Spokesman, 1961) p. 345.

¹²⁹ *House of Commons Journal*, Vol. 5, 1 August 1648, pp. 654-657. *House of Lords Journal*, Vol. 10, 2 August 1648, pp. 406-414.

¹³⁰ J Lilburne, *Legall and Fundamental Liberties*, (London, 1649) E567[1] reproduced in W Haller and G Davies, *The Leveller Tracts 1647-53*, p. 414.

the King: 'being at liberty, not liking in the least the several juglings of divers great ones in reference to a personall Treaty, and that there was nothing worth praising...by the Parliament in reference to the Peoples Liberties or Freedoms...I was compelled in conscience to have a hand in that most excellent of Petitions of 11 of Septemb. 1648'.¹³¹ This was the so-called Large Petition.

The Large Petition or, to give it its full title, *The Humble Petition of divers wel affected Persons inhabiting the City of London, Westminster, the Borough of Southwark, Hamlets and places adjacent* was probably mainly written by John Lilburne and William Walwyn. When it was presented to Parliament it was said to have 40,000 signatures. The Levellers organized a demonstration to attend its presentation at Westminster. On the 13th September a demonstration at Parliament in favour of the petition 'became so bold as to clamour at the very Door against such Members as they conceived cross to their Designs; and said they resolved to have their large petition taken into consideration before a Treaty [with the king]; that they knew no Use of a King or Lords any longer...'. The Large Petition was, as we have seen, the great original on which pattern were drawn many of the subsequent petitions from localities and from the Army that countered the pro-Treaty petitions over the coming months.¹³²

The Second Civil War further radicalized the Army. The Levellers were again drawing closer to those Independents who had opposed them at the Putney Debates and the rendezvous at Ware. The Large Petition was therefore better disposed to the Army. It was more harshly critical of the Parliament that had withdrawn the Vote of No Addresses and was attempting to conclude a Treaty with the King. The Petition insisted that 'the safety of the People is above the law' and that 'most of the oppressions of the Common-wealth have in all times bin brought upon the people by the King and Lords'.¹³³ In the wake of the success of the Large Petition the Levellers

¹³¹ J Lilburne, *Legall and Fundamental Liberties*.

¹³² See B Manning, *1649 The Crisis of the English Revolution* (London, Bookmarks, 1992) p. 19.

¹³³ *The Humble Petition of divers wel affected Persons inhabiting the City of London, Westminster, the Borough of Southwark, Hamlets and places adjacent* (hereafter I refer to this as the Large Petition even though, confusingly, the Leveller petition of March 1647 is also sometimes referred to in the same way). A L Morton, *Freedom in Arms* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1975) pp. 186-187.

mounted their largest ever campaign to drive the course of national politics away from a Treaty with the King and toward the adoption of the *Agreement of the People*.¹³⁴

Besides the Levellers, there was one other organized force resisting efforts to 're-inthroned' the King and pushing for a radical political outcome: those Independents around Cromwell and Henry Ireton.¹³⁵ By early September Colonel Ludlow, a radical Independent sympathetic to the Levellers, had already visited Ireton at the siege of Colchester to encourage him to act against the King. It is possible Rainsborough, who was also at Colchester, was at least aware of the meeting. Even Ireton, at the time he met with Ludlow, did not want to act before a Treaty was concluded between Parliament and the King.¹³⁶ But by the 27th September Ireton had become convinced that action was necessary to purge Parliament of those that wanted to 're-inthroned' the King, for this was the date on which he wrote a long letter to Lord Fairfax expressing this view.¹³⁷ But Fairfax was opposed to any radical action. Ireton was the key active figure among the Independents, but in late September and early October he was in a state of despair. He had withdrawn from the Army headquarters to Windsor and, subsequently, tendered his resignation (a 'pretended' resignation, says Lilburne).¹³⁸ It was the negotiations between Parliament and the King that were, according to *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, 'the true cause, why Ireton left the Headquarters, and retired to Windsor'.¹³⁹ And although Ireton's resignation was not accepted, he could find no way forward. Ireton began work on the document that would become the

¹³⁴ S R Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War*, Vol. 4 (London, Windrush, 1987) p226. See also *Packets of Letters*, pp. 5-6. E469[21].

¹³⁵ The term 're-inthroned' comes from a petition of Ireton's regiment. See *A True Copy of a Petition...by the Officers and Soldiers of the Regiment under the Command of Commissary General Ireton*. E468[18].

¹³⁶ E Ludlow, *Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1894) pp. 203-204. Ludlow records, 'I went to Commissary General Ireton...we both agreed that it was necessary for the army to interpose in this matter, but differed about time; he being of the opinion, that it was best to permit the King and Parliament to make an agreement, and to wait till they had made full discovery of their intentions, whereby the people becoming sensible of their own danger, would willingly join to oppose them.' Although much work has been done on the ways in which Ludlow's manuscript was re-written by his editors there seems little that directly throws doubt on this incident. Certainly the views attributed to Ireton by Ludlow are congruent with other accounts of his outlook at this time. See B Worden, *Roundhead Reputations* (London, 2001) esp. Ch. 2. S R Gardiner's judgment on this passage was that 'Ludlow can never be trusted about dates, but I do not think he would have written that he went to Colchester if his visit had been at a later time when the army was some other place. If he did go to Colchester his visit cannot have been later than about Sept. 6, as it was known in London on the 8th that Ireton was no longer there'. *History of the Great Civil War*, Vol. 4, (London, Windrush, 1987) p. 213 n. 1.

¹³⁷ D Farr, *Henry Ireton and the English Revolution* (Woodbridge, Boydell, 2006) p. 130.

¹³⁸ J Lilburne, *Legall and Fundamental Liberties*, E567[1].

¹³⁹ See D Farr, *Henry Ireton*, p130. See also R M Ramsey, *Henry Ireton* (London, Longmans, 1949) pp. 110-114.

Remonstrance of the Army during his stay in Windsor but it was impossible, under the circumstances then pertaining, that it would be accepted by Fairfax and the circle of the high command of the New Model Army. Only pressure on the Council of Officers and MPs from below could radically change this situation.

The Levellers were engaged in just such a campaign. The demands of the Large Petition were now being reproduced in letters and petitions that began to flow into army headquarters. They, in turn, were reprinted in the Leveller press. Agitators reappeared in at least two regiments and they were demanding that the Council of the Army be recalled. By late October ‘most regiments were in dangerous political condition’, according to Ian Gentles.¹⁴⁰ And, at about the same time as Ireton was writing to Fairfax, Edward Sexby was heading North as Leveller messenger for a second meeting with Cromwell.¹⁴¹ Gradually, with Cromwell’s blessing, Ireton moved towards co-operation with the Levellers. Of this moment David Farr says ‘Ireton now sought to enact a settlement “without” reference to Charles that he had called for in general terms in the January 1648 *Declaration*. In order to do so, however, Ireton, ever the political realist, needed to rebuild the links with the Levellers that had been broken at Putney’. This formulation however could give the impression that the decision by Ireton to seek an alliance with the Levellers was a free choice whereas in fact Ireton had few other options given the Leveller-assisted pressure from the Army remonstrances and the opposition of the Officers of the Army.¹⁴² Rainsborough’s murder occurred at just this moment.

From the siege of Colchester to the siege of Pontefract

Rainsborough had been a target of the Presbyterians from at least the time of Thomas Edwards’ attack on him for taking the glory of the siege of Worcester from their favourite Colonel Whalley.¹⁴³ Rainsborough subsequently became Governor of Worcester and MP for Droitwich.

¹⁴⁰ I Gentles, *The New Model Army in England, Ireland and Scotland, 1645-1653* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1992) p. 269.

¹⁴¹ See H Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, p. 361. *Mercurius Elenticus*, 4 October 1648.

¹⁴² D Farr, *Henry Ireton*, p. 132. See also I Gentles, ‘The Politics of Fairfax’s Army, 1645-9’, in J Adamson, *The English Civil War* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) pp. 191-192.

¹⁴³ T Edwards, *Gangraena*, pt. III (London, 1646) pp. 132, 136. Letter from Fairfax, 20 July, 1646, HLMP, HL/PO/JO/10/1/210.

However, the political tensions surrounding Rainsborough's role in the sieges of Colchester and Pontefract illustrate the widening nature of the conflicts both between Royalists and Parliamentarians and within the Parliamentary camp. Royalist animosity towards Rainsborough was hardened by events at the end of the siege of Colchester. Fairfax's victorious troops entered Colchester on 28th August. The Royalists in Colchester had previously dismissed three offers of quarter and Fairfax's Council of War, which included Ireton, Colonel Whalley and Rainsborough, met and decided that two Royalist commanders, Sir Charles Lucas and Sir George Lisle, should be executed. Rainsborough acted as one of the Commissioners who agreed the Articles of Surrender.¹⁴⁴ Whalley, Ireton and Rainsborough were charged with ensuring that the verdict of the Council of War be carried out, although it was Ireton who seems to have been most closely associated with the actual execution involving himself in a lengthy argument with Lucas about the judicial basis of the execution.¹⁴⁵ The Royalists instantly claimed Lucas and Lisle as martyrs. Fairfax and Rainsborough were demonized for their part in the killings.

The first attempt on the life of Rainsborough took place only a month after the execution of Lucas and Lisle at Colchester, possibly in an act of vengeance, as he rode from Army headquarters in St. Albans to London.¹⁴⁶ The Royalist *Mercurius Pragmaticus* added to its report of the attack on Rainsborough that there was also a plot to stab Fairfax which, it concluded, 'shew there is no plague like a guilty conscience'.¹⁴⁷ The final months of the Second Civil War were a

¹⁴⁴ Lucas had been in charge of Berkeley castle at the end of the First Civil War when Rainsborough took Lucas' surrender. Lucas returned to fight the New Model in the last engagement of the war. Rainsborough might not have felt that lenient terms were appropriate again. J Sprigge, *Anglia Rediviva: England's Recovery, Being the History of the Motions, Actions and Successes of the Army under the Immediate Conduct of His Excellency Sir Thomas Fairfax, KT.* (Oxford, 1854) pp. 136-137. J Rushworth, 'Historical Collections: The proceedings of Fairfax's Army', *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State*: Vol. 6: 1645-47 (1722), pp. 89-116. Also see W R D Jones, *Thomas Rainborowe (c1610-1648) Civil War Seaman, Siegemaster and Radical* (Woodbridge, Boydell, 2005) pp. 39-40. H R Williamson, *Four Stuart Portraits* (London, Evans Brothers, 1949) pp. 115-116.

¹⁴⁵ W Clarke, *Clarke Papers*, Vol. II (London, Royal Historical Society, 1992) pp31-39. S R Gardiner, *Great Civil War*, Vol. 4, p. 203. B Donagan, *War in England 1642-1649* (Oxford, OUP, 2010) pp. 364-366.

¹⁴⁶ J Rushworth, 'Proceedings in Parliament: September 1st - October 2nd 1648', *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State*: Vol. 7: 1647-48 (1721), pp. 1248-1280.

¹⁴⁷ *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, Tuesday 26 September to 3 October 1648. E465[19].

dangerous time when the animosities generated by years of conflict were reaching a crescendo.¹⁴⁸

Cromwell's victory at Preston and the victory of Fairfax and Rainsborough at Colchester left Pontefract Castle as the remaining Royalist stronghold in England. This important garrison had changed hands twice in the Civil War already. It was hotly contested because it was the key to the North. A siege by Parliamentary forces began in July. It was commanded by Sir Edward Rodes and Sir Henry Cholmley. Cholmley was certainly not an enthusiastic Parliamentarian. A year before he began the siege of Pontefract, on 8th July 1647, he wrote to the Speaker of the House of Commons outlining the problems, as he saw them, of the Parliamentary cause in Yorkshire. He wrote that the Parliament had more enemies than friends in the area and that the common soldiers were 'so well agitated' by Lilburne that they were in the same condition as the soldiers in the South. He urged peace between Parliament and the Army. 'Otherwise' Cholmley warned 'Clubbs and Clouted Shoes will in the end be too hard for them both.'¹⁴⁹

Cholmley's military conduct of the siege of Pontefract was certainly compatible with these political sentiments. Royalist raiding parties ranged far and wide through the local countryside, virtually unimpeded by Cholmley's troops. All the while Cholmley remained on the friendliest terms possible with those he besieged.¹⁵⁰ It was said, 'They... make a Fair of their Horses near the Castle, sell them to Sir Henry Cholmleys Troopers, and in the Cessation they drink to one another, Here is to thee Brother Roundhead, and I thank thee Brother Cavalier'.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ J Rushworth, 'Proceedings in Parliament: September 1st - October 2nd 1648', pp. 1248-1280.

¹⁴⁹ Bod., Tanner MS. 58 f.346. A Southern, *Forlorn Hope, Soldier Radicals of the Seventeenth Century* (Lewes, The Book Guild, 2001) p. 67.

¹⁵⁰ *The Moderate*, Number 15, Tuesday October 17 to Tuesday October 24 (London, 1648). E468[24]. This report is taken directly from the letter written from Pontefract on 20th October and printed as *A Bloudy Fight at Pontefract Castle in Yorkshire* (1648). E469[4].

¹⁵¹ J Rushworth, 'Proceedings in Parliament: October 2nd - November 1st, 1648', pp. 1281-1314. The story is also told in *A Full Relation of the Horrid Murder committed upon the body of Col. Rainsborough, the persons that did it, and the cause thereof* (London, 1648). E470[4]. See also E Peacock, 'Notes on the Life of Thomas Rainborowe', *Archaeologia* 46 (1880) p. 40.

Given the condition of the siege it is not surprising that Fairfax should order the New Model Army's foremost siegemaster to take matters in hand.¹⁵² Rainsborough duly arrived in Doncaster, a few days after his regiment, on 14 October 1648. The following day Rainsborough wrote to Fairfax alerting him to Cholmley's resistance and complaining of his own lack of horse and ammunition. He was clearly unhappy and said he would 'take it for a very great respect to be excused from this service'.¹⁵³ At the same time Cholmley wrote to the Speaker of the House complaining that Rainsborough was too young and that 'his Excellency the Lord Fairfax had given a Commission to Col. Rainsborough to command in chief before Pontefract-Castle, and that the disparagement was great to him'.¹⁵⁴

The Moderate's report from Pontefract on 28 October brings together the themes of Cholmley's disastrous conduct of the siege and opposition from Rainsborough and soldiers to a Treaty with the King. Having told of Cholmley's misconduct of military operations it reports that 'The forces in the West, say they will not suffer themselves to be enslaved by this Malignant and Bugbear Treaty' and that 'all Delinquents (without exception)' should suffer 'to condigne punishment'. It goes on to tell of similar sentiments in other regiments, including Rainsborough's, and of their efforts to co-ordinate their actions.¹⁵⁵

What is important for the purpose of this account is that Cholmley's conduct of the siege and his antipathy to Rainsborough were known about in the high-command of the Army, in Parliament and in the London press before Rainsborough was killed. For many who were opposed to the Treaty with the King, Cholmley appeared as an example of what disasters could be caused by attempting to placate the Royalists or by not prosecuting action against them with sufficient zeal. Relations between Cholmley and Rainsborough were a microcosm of relations between pro-Treaty moderates and anti-Treaty radicals.

¹⁵² Some historians have speculated that Rainsborough was sent North by Fairfax and/or Cromwell in order to keep him away from his radical political allies in London and, possibly, to deliberately endanger his life. Both may be true, but there is no direct evidence for either. In any case the choice of Rainsborough for the task of besieging Pontefract was so obvious that no other reason needed to be advanced. For a summary see H R Williamson, 'The Assassination of Colonel Rainsborough, 29 October 1648' in, *Who Was the Man in the Iron Mask?* (London, Penguin, 2002) pp. 173-191.

¹⁵³ HMC, Leyborne-Popham Papers (London, 1899) pp. 6-8.

¹⁵⁴ J Rushworth, 'Proceedings in Parliament: October 2nd - November 1st, 1648', pp. 1281-1314.

¹⁵⁵ *The Moderate*, Number 16, Tuesday October 24 to Tuesday October 13. *Packets of Letters*, p. 6. E469[21].

The death of Rainsborough

Thomas Rainsborough was killed early on the morning of Sunday 29th October. He died at his lodgings in the centre of Doncaster, where he was staying while waiting for the disputed command of Pontefract's besieging forces to be resolved by Parliament. His killers were from a 22 strong Royalist raiding party who, with the help of a spy in Doncaster, tricked the guard placed at the entrance to the town and gained access to Rainsborough's quarters. Reports of the murder were carried in the press, especially the Leveller press.

The Moderate gave some information about events immediately before and after the killing. It claimed that the officer in charge of the guard, Captain John Smith, was at a brothel in Doncaster all night when he was supposed to be on duty. Smith immediately fled the regiment for London, although he strongly contested the allegation in the pamphlet *The Innocent Cleared* printed in Amsterdam.¹⁵⁶ The Commons received letters from Pontefract on the 4th November which read:

the great Discontents of the County at Sir Henry Cholmley's ill Management of the Seige against Pontefract... more particularly, the horrid Murther of Col. Rainsborough...his Horse permitting the Enemy... to return back again at Noon-time of the Day, and not a Pistol fired at them: Some of his own Officers of Foot are bringing up Articles to the House concerning him.¹⁵⁷

The Moderate report told of a letter sent by the Royalist Governor of Pontefract to Cholmley saying 'that he had now decided the controversie about the Command for his men had left Rainsborough dead in Doncaster street'. Cholmley, said the report, 'very much laughed and rejoyced'. Cholmley's horse were disbanded by the Commons on the 9th November. Cholmley himself survived the war and became one of the delegation that went to Charles II to invite him

¹⁵⁶ J Smith, *The Innocent Cleared: or a Vindication of Captaine John Smith* (Amsterdam, 1648) E472[25]. Smith's previous service under Ludlow and Marten might make him seem an unlikely accessory to Rainsborough's murder. But there is no proof whether or not he was deliberately (or indeed accidentally) negligent.

¹⁵⁷ J Rushworth, 'Proceedings in Parliament from November 1 to December 1, 1648', pp. 1281-1314.

back to England in 1660.¹⁵⁸ These then were the reports that circulated concerning the death of Rainsborough.

The mood among supporters of the Levellers may be judged from *The Moderate*. In the issue that preceded Rainsborough's funeral it was pouring out its ire on Cholmley for his 'publicly declared' view that the invading Scots army 'were his friends' 'before we routed them' and that 'this Armie his enemies...and that the next work they were to go upon, was to destroy this Army'. 'Therefore judge', concluded *The Moderate*, 'if the Governour and he did not lay the design to murder gallant Rainsborough.'¹⁵⁹ Combining opposition to a Treaty with Charles and a desire for revenge on Rainsborough's killers, the issue concluded with verse:

The Treaty's now effected, all's agreed;
 Draw, draw for Freedome, or we're slaves indeed;
 The King's upon escape, looke, looke about you,
 You'r all betry'd, and how the Cabbs then flout you.
 Now Cholmley laugh, and let Malignants grin,
 Yet know from hence your reckoning shall begin:
 Up then stout souls, born for the peoples good,
 Mount him to his grave, and next revenge his blood.
 For though intomb'd with Honour Rainsborow lies,
 Yet still his dust for satisfaction cries.

The call to arms in the face of imminent danger and the desire for revenge are fused into a single urgent message in this verse. *Mercurius Militaris* (*The Army Scout*), even sharper in phrase and more militant in tone than *The Moderate*, seems to have caught the mood most forcefully in a direct call for the execution of the King.

¹⁵⁸ H R Williamson, 'The Assassination of Colonel Rainsborough, 29 October 1648', p. 182.

¹⁵⁹ *The Moderate*, Number 18, Tuesday November 7 to Tuesday November 14, (London, 1648). E472[4]. 'Cabbs' or 'Cabs' is a nickname for Cavaliers, from the Spanish for horseman, 'Caballero'.

Shall not his blood be doubly avenged upon the heads of such barbarous worse than brutish villaines? But the misery is there is no blood amongst the Cabs worthy to be named in the same day the head of that crew, even his blood, as to gallant Rainsbroughs blood, is not better than asses; yet he being the original cause of this butchery, Upon his head the guilt must rest, no way expiated.

It was only his transcendent gallantry for his Countries freedom that caused his blood to be thirsted after and no blood fit to answer it, as that of the head of the Tyrants.¹⁶⁰

One of the letters that brought the news of Rainsborough's death to the Houses of Parliament also contained news of the reaction of the soldiers of the New Model Army to the loss of one of their best known and most radical officers: 'the whole Souldiery... lay this businesse much to heart, and...we hope care will be taken to preserve us from their malice, and to bring those to condign punishment which do justly deserve it, that they may be a terror to others from running into like mischiefs'.¹⁶¹ The Commons immediately sent a message to Cromwell instructing him to make 'a strict and exact scrutiny of the manner of the horrible murder of Colonel Rainsborough'.¹⁶²

Rainsborough's death took place amidst a wider climate of fear that we have already seen existed at the time of the first attempt on Rainsborough's life. Accompanying the letters bringing news of Rainsborough's death was 'A List of the chiefe of the members of both Houses of Parliament, and Officers of the Army, against whom the design is discovered to take away their lives'. The plot was said to threaten the lives of 80 parliamentary leaders, including Fairfax, Cromwell, Lord Say and Sele and Colonels Hammond, Pride, Rich, Hewson and Okey. A vote was moved to bring up an additional regiment of horse and foot to secure the House,

¹⁶⁰ *Mecurius Militaris* or *The Armies Schout*[Scout], Number 4, Tuesday October 31 to Tuesday November 8 (London, 1648). E470[14].

¹⁶¹ *A Full Relation of the Horrid Murder committed upon the body if Col. Rainsborough, the persons that did it, and the cause thereof* (London, 1648). E470[4].

¹⁶² See H R Williamson, 'The Assassination of Colonel Rainsborough, 29 October 1648', pp. 189-190.

but it was not passed because the regiments already doing the work were ‘thought more fit’.¹⁶³

A few days later, however, ‘The Commons spent much Time in the Debate of the Report concerning the Guarding of the House, which was clearly and unanimously concluded to be in great Danger by reason of the malignant Party, who flock up to London, and as is conceived, upon some dangerous Design at the Breach of the Treaty, most of them having Daggers and Pistols in their Pockets.’¹⁶⁴ Given the highly polarized politics in London at this time the concerns of Parliament were real enough.

Royalists rejoiced at the death of Rainsborough.¹⁶⁵ Levellers and soldiers called for the execution of the King to avenge the death of Rainsborough. Politics were polarizing and Rainsborough’s murder, and the political reaction to it, was an important moment in that process.

The funeral

A week after Rainsborough’s death Cromwell was at Knottingly in Yorkshire on his way to take control of the siege of Pontefract. W C Abbott, the editor of Cromwell’s *Writings and Speeches*, notes of this period: ‘The death of Rainsborough deepened the hatred of the army toward the King; and while Cromwell was busy with the siege of Pontefract, that idea spread from the Levellers, who had long advocated it to more moderate men’.¹⁶⁶ Abbott’s general point is right, but he suggests that Cromwell was more passive than was in fact the case. In November Cromwell attempted to answer Robin Hammond’s fears of the Levellers. He also met with Lilburne and, separately, Henry Marten.¹⁶⁷ On 7th November 1648 Fairfax called a Council of

¹⁶³ Attached as an appendix to *A Full Relation of the Horrid Murder committed upon the body if Col. Rainsborough, the persons that did it, and the cause thereof*. See also *The Moderate Intelligencer*, Number 189, Thursday October 26 to Thursday November 2, 1648 (London). E470[1].

¹⁶⁴ J Rushworth, ‘Proceedings in Parliament from November 1 to December 1, 1648’, pp. 1281-1314.

¹⁶⁵ See *The Life and Death of Philip Herbert, the late infamous Knight of Barkshire, once Earle of Pembroke, Montgomerie, &c, who departed from this life to another January 23, 1649. Having by his Degenerate basenesse betrayed his Nobilite, and entered himself a Commoner, among the vere Scum of the Kingdom* (London, 1649) E592[1]. Also see *The Famous Tragedie of King Charles* (London, 1649) in which the death of Lucas and Lisle at the siege of Colchester is connected to the death of Charles and blamed on, among others, ‘the Leveller Rainsborough’. *An Ironicall Expostulation with Death and Fate...also a brief Discourse held Octob. 29 between Col. Rainsborough and Charon at their Meeting* (1648). E472[18].

¹⁶⁶ W C Abbott, *Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, Vol. I, 1599-1649 (Harvard, 1937) p. 674.

¹⁶⁷ See H Brailsford, *The Levellers and the English Revolution*, p. 362. See W C Abbott, *Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, Vol. I, 1599-1649 (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard, 1937) p. 676.

Officers, though not the Council of the Army, thus excluding the Agitators. Meeting at St. Albans, it considered Ireton's first draft of the *Remonstrance* on 10th November. Fairfax spoke against the *Remonstrance* and it was rejected. The log-jam remained. The following day the Remonstrance of the three regiments was presented to Fairfax. As importantly the consequences of Lilburne's meeting with Cromwell were playing themselves out in exactly the period immediately before Rainsborough's funeral. Cromwell responded to a letter from Lilburne by directing the Independents to meet with the Levellers, 'some of whom appointed a meeting at the Nags-head Tavern by Blackwell-Hall, and invited M. Wildman and my self, &c. thither...'. This first meeting divided over whether to 'cut off the Kings head...and force and thoroughly purge, if not dissolve Parliament' before agreeing a constitutional settlement of the nation, as the Independents wanted, or whether a settlement must be agreed before action was taken, as the Levellers wanted. After debate it was agreed matters would be decided at a second meeting of representatives from both sides.¹⁶⁸ But before this meeting took place Thomas Rainsborough's funeral procession dominated the London scene.

The funeral was a planned, political demonstration of the Leveller movement. It was an 'unofficial, revolutionary pageant' designed as 'a gesture of defiance against the established powers', in the words of Ian Gentles.¹⁶⁹ The funeral took place at a politically critical juncture. Many radicals feared that Parliament was about to conclude a Treaty with the King that would mean an unacceptable 're-inthroning' of the monarch. The day before the funeral a single-side sheet, *An Elegie Upon the Honourable Colonel Thomas Rainsborough*, explicitly argued that Rainsborough's death should be understood as a providential warning against a Treaty with the King:

What if Heaven purpos'd Rainsborough's fall to be

A prop for Englands dying Libertie?

¹⁶⁸ J Lilburne, *Legall and Fundamental Liberties*, W Haller and G Davies, *The Leveller Tracts 1647-1653*, pp. 415-16. Sean Kelsey brings out the degree of indecision among some of those that tried the King over whether he should be executed. Kelsey does not however discuss this account by Lilburne which provides evidence that some Army officers were intent on execution at least by early November 1648. See S Kelsey, 'The Death of Charles I', *The Historical Journal*, 45, 4 (2002) pp. 727-754.

¹⁶⁹ I Gentles, 'Political Funerals during the English Revolution' in S Porter, *London and the Civil War* (London, MacMillan, 1996) p. 207.

And did in Love thus suffer one to fall
 That Charles by Treaty might not ruine all?
 For who'l expect that Treaty should doe good
 Whose longer date commenc't in Rainsborough's blood?¹⁷⁰

The verse went on to tell 'noble Fairfax' and 'bold Cromwel' that if they were to 'Conclude a peace with Charles' they would end up riding in 'robes of Scarlet' dyed in 'your own dearest blood' because 'instead of Gold' Charles would 'pay you all with steel'.

It was in this atmosphere that the date and time of Rainsborough's funeral were announced in advance in the Leveller press. *Mecurius Militaris* gave an account of the murder of Rainsborough in its edition dated 31st October to 8th November. Following the description of the murder it argued that 'until right be done upon his adversaries',

I desire right may be done to his corps in remembrance that such a noble soul once possessed it; to that end I desire all in whom any sparkd of this brave soul dwel, even all the lovers of their Country, may take notice that on Tuesday next, being the 14 of Nov. about ten a clock at the latest, his honourable Corps is to be met at Tatnam-high-cross, two miles beyond Kings-land, within five miles of London, to be attended honourably into London.

Following this public call to attend the funeral *Mecurius Militaris* sought to stir its readers with a poem extolling Rainsborough's virtues.¹⁷¹ *The Moderate* also gave an account of Rainsborough's death, ending it with this call to arms:

Can the soldiery of this Kingdom be silent, and not revenge the barbarous murder of
 their incomparable Commander, the like for sea and land service never came out of the

¹⁷⁰ J.T., *An Elegie Upon the Colonel Thomas Rainsborough, butchered at Doncaster Sunday the 29 Octob. 1648*. 669 f.13.[48].

¹⁷¹ *Mecurius Militaris* or *The Armies Schout*, Number 4, Tuesday October 31 to Tuesday November 8 (London, 1648).

bowels of this Nation. The Lord stir up your hearts to be avenged of these bloody enemies.

And the paper made a public appeal to all the ‘well-affected’ to join the funeral procession:

The Corps of the never to be forgotten, English Champion, is to be brought to London on Tuesday next, the 14 instant, to be there interred. Major Rainsborow his brother, with other of his kindred goes to Tatnam-High Cross to meet them; All the well affected in London and parts adjacent are desired to accompany them; the hour of ten in the morning is desired to be the longest for their being in Tatnam.¹⁷²

The scale of the procession must have exceeded the Levellers’ expectations, although the most detailed accounts of the funeral itself come from sources hostile to the Levellers. *Mercurius Elencticus* described Rainsborough’s funeral as the event that ‘crowned the day’:

[Rainsborough’s] sacred corps conveyed from Doncaster, came this day to London, being met and attended on by a great number of the well affected of all Professions, Will: the Weaver, Tom the Tapster, Kit the Cobler, Dick the Doore Sweeper, and many more Apron youths of the City, who trudg’d very devoutly both before and behind this glorious Saint, with about 100 she-votresses crowded up in Coaches, and some 500 more of the better sort of Brethern mounted on Hackney beasts...¹⁷³

Apart from conveying the scale of the procession this account is immediately striking in two ways. Firstly, the unmistakable note of snobbery pervades the piece, giving us a glimpse of the force of class feeling engendered by the revolution but not so clearly visible on other occasions. Secondly, the particular reference to ‘she-votresses’ exhibits hostility both to the participation of women in politics and to democracy more generally. The account in *Mercurius Elencticus* does however give us a detailed account of the route of the funeral procession:

¹⁷² *The Moderate*, Number 17, Tuesday October 31 to Tuesday November 7 (London, 1648) E470[12].

¹⁷³ *Mercurius Elencticus*, Number 52, Wednesday 15 November to Wednesday 22 November (London, 1648) E473[9].

The Body came in by way of Islington, and so through Smithfield, (where they should have burnt it) thence along Old Baily (in defiance of Newgate and the Sessions house) and under Ludgate, not through Pauls [for there the Organs stood, but on the backside of the church and so along Cheapside. Sure they were aware of the Ground whereon the crosse was founded] and through Cornwall, in great pompe, and with a variety of sad postures; at length they arrived at Wapping chappell, where they bestowed this precious peece of Mortality, as nigh as might be to the tombe of the Honourable and expert Skuller his father, where the Godly Party (with their hands in their pockets) lamented his untimely Grave...¹⁷⁴

As a mark of official respect the cannon at the Tower were fired as the funeral took place.¹⁷⁵ A single sheet poem by Thomas Alleyn, *An Elegie on the Death of that Renowned Heroe Col Rainsborrow*, was collected by Thomason on the day of the funeral itself, the 14 November. It must therefore have been printed in advance and been available that day or possibly earlier, acting as an encouragement to attend the procession and to amplify its message.¹⁷⁶ Such verses, fly-sheets and broadsides would have been widely distributed. In a pamphlet acquired by Thomason the week after the funeral Captain John Smith, accused of being an accomplice in the murder of Rainsborough, complained that his enemies 'have caused Ballads and Songs to be made of me and sung up and down London streets'.¹⁷⁷

Mercurius Elencticus used Rainsborough's seafaring career as basis of a poem that celebrated how great a loss Rainsborough was to the Godly Party and how ship-wrecked their project was without him. It concluded that 'now the traytor has his just reward'. Marchmont Nedham's *Mercurius Pragmaticus* managed to combine seafaring allusion with snobbery: 'the carkasse of

¹⁷⁴ *Mercurius Elencticus*, Number 52.

¹⁷⁵ *Mercurius Elencticus*, Number 52.

¹⁷⁶ T Alleyn, *An Elegie on the Death of that Renowned Heroe Col Rainsborrow*, 1648. 669 f.13[41].

¹⁷⁷ Captain John Smith, *The Innocent Cleared* (London, 1648). E472[25].

Rainsborough was attended by a regiment of horse, all the tag-rags of the faction that were able to hire horses, entered at Wapping among his fellow-swabbers and skippers'.¹⁷⁸

The scale of the procession was impressive. The *Moderate Intelligencer* reported that 'This day came through London the Corps of Col. Rainsborough, accompanied with very many Coaches, and neer 1,500 horse'.¹⁷⁹ *Mercurius Militaris* estimated the demonstration to be larger still:

This day the body of that gallant Heroe Col Rainsborough brought to the City,
accompanied by fifty or sixty Caroches, and near three thousand Gentlemen and
Citizens on horseback, with great lamentation he was entombed honourably with his
father at Wapping.¹⁸⁰

For the Levellers' supporters the size of the procession was not the only remarkable element of the day. The inscription on Rainsborough's tombstone at the family church in Wapping told its own story:

He that made King, Lords, Commons, Judges shake,
Cities, and Committees quake:
He that sought nought but his dear Countreys good,
And seal'd their right with his last blood.
Rainsborow the just, the valiant, and the true,
Here bids the noble Levellers adue.¹⁸¹

This inscription is not just testimony to the connection between Rainsborough's radical politics and the Levellers. It is also noticeable for the positive use of the term Leveller by the movement itself. Unlike the use of the term Leveller on other occasions this use contains no qualifier along

¹⁷⁸ *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, 14 November to 21 November (London, 1648) E473[7]. See also I Gentles, 'Political Funerals during the English Revolution', p. 218.

¹⁷⁹ *The Moderate Intelligencer*, Thursday November 9 to Thursday November 16 (London, 1648). E472[11].

¹⁸⁰ *Mercurius Militaris*, November 14 to November 21 1648 (London). E473[8]. See also E Peacock, 'Notes on the Life of Thomas Rainborowe', *Archaeologia* 46 (1880).

¹⁸¹ *In Memoriam Thomas Rainsborough, Pro Populo, & Parlamento* (London, November 14, 1648) 669 f.13[40]. Reprinted in the *The Moderate*, Number 18, Tuesday November 7 to Tuesday November 14, (London, 1648) E472[4].

the lines of ‘falsely so-called’.¹⁸² Another moment of symbolism from the day of funeral also became identified with the movement: the adoption of the sea-green colour as that of the Leveller movement. As Ian Gentles records ‘from the time of his funeral his personal colours, green and black, were adopted as the badge of the Leveller movement.’¹⁸³ Certainly attacks on the Levellers that associated them with sea-green followed the funeral.

A satirical attack on the Levellers in the single sheet *The Gallant Rights, Priviledges, Solemn Institutions of the Sea-Green Order* was acquired by Thomason 13 days after Rainsborough’s funeral. Throughout the text there is great play on the novelty of the Levellers being known as the ‘Sea-Green Order’. The single side of text uses the Sea-Green tag seven times. It refers to the ‘Fundamental Right of the Sea-Green Order’; it tells readers that the Levellers have chosen ‘deep Sea Green...our Flag and Colours, and do hereby ordain and authorize it to be worn as the lively badge of Constancy, Sufferance and Valour in grain, the cognizance of Justice, and the mark of Freedom and Deliverance’. Finally the pamphlet declares ‘That whosoever shall jeer, baffle, or vilifie our Colours, or reproach the Wearer...shall be censured Anti Leveller, a Malignant, Revolter, Grandee Creature, or Dammed Varlet, and to be registered by the SEA-GREEN Scout, in the Roll of Justice and Revenge...’.¹⁸⁴ In what seems likely to be a direct reference to the practice at Rainsborough’s funeral this sheet also says ‘That every one so wearing our Colours in hatband, cuff, garment, bridle, mayn, or sail...shall hence forth, according to our Noble Order, be intituled the Free born Assistant of Justice...’. The sheet was then reprinted with minor alterations as an eight page pamphlet under the title *The Levellers Institutions for a Good People and Good Parliament*. Thomason dates his acquisition of this version as 30th November.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Although Lilburne himself used the term in a more neutral way when he described his supporters as ‘we that were nick-named Levellers’ in J Lilburne, *Legall and Fundamental Liberties*, W Haller and G Davies, *The Leveller Tracts 1647-1653*, p. 420. The Quakers also appropriated a name that was first used pejoratively.

¹⁸³ I Gentles, ‘Political Funerals during the English Revolution’, p. 217.

¹⁸⁴ ‘The Gallant Rights, Christian Priviledges, Solemn Institutions of the Sea-Green Order’ 1648. 669 f.13[4].

¹⁸⁵ *The Levellers Institutions for a Good People and Good Parliament* (London, 1648) E474[4].

The practice of wearing sea green to denote association with the Leveller cause seems to have become widespread. It was worn again at the funeral of Leveller Robert Lockyer in April 1649. In May *Mercurius Militaris* was describing ‘the brave Blades of the sea-green order honest Johns Lifeguard’ and the ‘bonny Besses, In the Sea-green dresses’ who strike fear into ‘Nol and his asses’.¹⁸⁶ And in July Richard Overton was himself writing to ‘my Brethren of the Sea green Order’.¹⁸⁷ The origin of wearing a ribbon as political identification goes back at least to the London peace campaigns of 1642-43.¹⁸⁸ And Royalist petitioners marched up from Surrey besieged the Commons in May 1648 wearing white and green ribbons.¹⁸⁹ For the Levellers it might also lie in their recent military experience.¹⁹⁰ But it seems clear that the adoption of the sea-green ribbon by the Levellers marks the invention of the ribbon as a party badge, the forerunner of, for instance, the ribbons and badges worn by the revolutionaries in France after 1789.

This symbolism had a political purpose. Six days after the funeral another broadsheet was collected by Thomason. *A New Elegie in Memory of the Right Valiant, and most Renowned Souldier, Col. Rainsborough* warned of the dangers of concluding a Treaty with Charles.¹⁹¹ The political messages that emerged from Rainsborough’s funeral were simple: no Treaty, no ‘apostasy’ in Parliament, the King and the Royalists must be brought to justice. The procession and the symbolism attending it identified the Levellers, to themselves and to others, as a coherent political organisation.

The funeral sermon

At the family church in Wapping, which Rainsborough’s father had helped to found and where he was buried, Thomas Brooks preached the sermon at the funeral. Brooks had been chaplain

¹⁸⁶ *Mercurius Militaris*, 8 May 1649. E554[13]. ‘Nol’ was a nickname for Cromwell. See also W R D Jones, *Thomas Rainborowe (c1610-1648)*, p. 136.

¹⁸⁷ R Overton, *The Baiting of the Great Bull of Bashan* in A L Morton, *Freedom in Arms* (London, 1975) p. 287.

¹⁸⁸ I Gentles, ‘Parliamentary Politics and the Politics of the Street: The London Peace Campaigns of 1642-3’ in *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 26, pt. 2 (2007) p. 144.

¹⁸⁹ R Ashton, *Counter-Revolution, The Second Civil War and its Origins, 1646-8* (New Haven, Yale, 1994) pp. 151-150.

¹⁹⁰ See *A Declaration and Some Proceedings*, W Haller and G Davies, *The Leveller Tracts 1647-1653*, p. 98.

¹⁹¹ *A New Elegie in Memory of the Right Valiant, and most Renowned Souldier, late Admirall of the narrow Seas* (London, 1648). 669 f.13[45].

to Rainsborough's father.¹⁹² Then, as the sermon says, he was with Thomas Rainsborough 'both at Sea and Land'.¹⁹³ His sermon follows the theme of what the Godly must do in order to appear glorious in the sight of God. Some passages reflect directly on the political circumstances in which the funeral took place.

Firstly, the sermon reveals how great a blow Rainsborough's death was to the radicals of the revolution and also tells us something of the impact of the response to his death. Brooks says, 'I have not observed that the hearts of the people of God, have been so generally and eminently affected with the losse of any Worthy, as with the losse of this Worthy'.¹⁹⁴ Brooks also reflects some of Rainsborough's egalitarian sentiments. He compares Rainsborough to David in his battle with Goliath. And he praises Rainsborough for persisiting where others fell by the wayside:

So men turn off the worke, it is too hard saith one, it is too high, it is too rough, it is too dangerous say others. Now to doe gloriously is to doe that that others refuse to doe, and that others have not the heart to doe. And in this respect this thrice-honoured Champion hath done gloriously...

Consciously or not Brooks was voicing sentiments very close to those that Rainsborough himself used in the Putney Debates.¹⁹⁵ At a moment when Parliament seemed likely to come to a Treaty with the King, Brooks lambasted those parliament men who were resiling from support for the radical Saints. When David battled Goliath, said Brooks, 'They did not stand disputing, wee have estates to loose, and if Saul know that wee joyne with David...we shall lose our heads and lose our estates... So, if Parliament-men, and those that have power, do not side with the Saints, deliverance will come another way, but they, and their fathers house may perish...?.'

¹⁹² A Southern, *Forlorn Hope*, p. 71.

¹⁹³ T Brooks, *The Glorious Day of the Saints Appearance* (London, 1648) E474[7].

¹⁹⁴ T Brooks, *The Glorious Day of the Saints Appearance*.

¹⁹⁵ A S P Wodehouse, *Puritanism and Liberty* (London, Dent, 1986) p. 14.

And at a time when Rainsborough's death was being used as a justification for the trial and possible execution of the King, Brooks used his sermon to hammer home the importance of justice being done to high and low alike: '...to do gloriously, is to do Justice impartially, upon high, and low, honourable, base, father, and sonne, kinsman, and brother, and that one is great, and the other is too meane for Justice; this is inglorious'.¹⁹⁶ Some of the same themes were also present when Brooks preached a Fast Day Sermon to the purged House of Commons on 26 December 1648.¹⁹⁷

The remonstrance of Rainsborough's regiment and the condition of the Army

Many of the political conflicts alluded to in Brooks' funeral sermon were stated more directly in the *Remonstrance of the regiment of the late Col. Rainsborough to his Excellency, for the revenge of their Colonells death*. This remarkable document was produced just six days after Rainsborough's funeral and it was of a piece with the wider mood in the New Model Army. It was reprinted in *The Moderate*.¹⁹⁸ The regiment's remonstrance moves almost immediately to the broadest political concerns about the possibility of a treaty with the King: 'we feare we are deluded into the hopes of a safe peace, by the expectation of an unsafe Treaty'. The case against a treaty with Charles is expressed with force and brevity:

That if the utmost purchase of the losse of so much pretious and declared righteous bloud, be onely a liberty to Treat with our Capitall Enemy... we are consigned to the most fruitless imployment, to be alwayes fighting for what we can never obtaine; Armies can subdue powers but not change minds...¹⁹⁹

The *Remonstrance* goes on to announce that the regiment is 'much perplexed' that the 'late resolutions of Parliament' engaged them to 'fight with an enraged enemy' yet now try to persuade them that 'all our differences can be wrapped up in the sweet compliance of a Treaty'. Rainsborough's regiment calls for 'impartiall Justice to be done upon the eminent undertakers

¹⁹⁶ T Brooks, *The Glorious Day of the Saints Appearance*.

¹⁹⁷ T Brooks, *Gods Delight in the Progresse of the Upright* (London, 1649) p. 19, 30. E536[6].

¹⁹⁸ *The Moderate*, Number 19, Tuesday Novemb. 14 to Tuesday November 21, 1648. E473[1].

¹⁹⁹ *Remonstrance of the regiment of the late Col. Rainsborough to his Excellency, for the revenge of their Colonells death* (London, 1648). E473[3].

of this second war' in order that 'cruell mercies showed to our implacable enemies, might not indanger the lives of our dearest friends'.²⁰⁰ The response of the House of Commons on 25th November was to order that 'the Tower regiment, late under the command of Colonel Rainborough, be forthwith disbanded'.²⁰¹ In fact Fairfax did not disband Rainsborough's regiment but instead gave it to another commander, one of the returning New Englanders, George Cook.²⁰²

The petition of Rainsborough's regiment was, as we have seen in chapter 4, part of an ongoing petition war. But by the autumn of 1648 the tide was beginning to turn and both army and civilian petitions against the Treaty became more numerous.²⁰³ The Levellers' Large Petition was important in turning the tide. Again, as we have seen, its influence on other petitions was considerable.²⁰⁴ After Rainsborough's murder his death was added to many petitions' list of crimes for which account must be given. Indeed the Army sent a petition to the King on the Isle of Wight expressing their 'exceeding great sense of the losse of Colonell Rainsborough' and telling him that they 'thought fit that an inquiry should be made about that wicked murder, and that justice should be done therein'.²⁰⁵ As Ian Gentles has noted, from the moment of Rainsborough's death most regimental petitions would contain a fresh demand: vengeance against his murderers.²⁰⁶

The scene after the funeral: the road to revolution

Events on the day after Rainsborough's funeral show the dramatic parting of the ways between the radicals and Parliament. On that day, the 15th November, Parliament voted that the King should be brought to London 'with freedom, safety, and honour, so soon as the Concessions of

²⁰⁰ *Remonstrance of the regiment of the late Col. Rainsborough*.

²⁰¹ *Commons Journal*, Vol. 6, p87. See also W R D Jones, *Thomas Rainborowe*, p. 135.

²⁰² C Firth and G Davies, *Regimental History of Cromwell's Army* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1940) pp. 577, 579.

²⁰³ R Ashton, *Counter-Revolution*, pp. 132-139.

²⁰⁴ R Ashton, *Counter-Revolution*, p. 157.

²⁰⁵ A Brady, 'Dying with Honour: Literary Propaganda and the Second Civil War', *The Journal of Military History* 70 (January, 2006) p. 27.

²⁰⁶ I Gentles, *The New Model Army*, p. 271.

the 'Treaty are concluded and agreed'.²⁰⁷ Army officers at St. Albans still tended to the same view when they met on the 15th November.

The meeting on the same day at the Nags Head near Blackwall Hall, attended by Lilburne, Marten and Ireton, could not have been further from Parliament's resolution or the sentiments of the officers at St Albans. With the enormous prestige of the Rainsborough funeral procession the previous day behind them the Levellers quickly concluded with the Independents a joint version of Ireton's *Remonstrance* with enough of the *Agreement of the People* in it to content them. Lilburne records that this was sent straight to the Army headquarters at St Albans:

Which Agreement of ours (as I remember) was immediately sent away to the Head Quarters in St. Alban's by Mr Hiland of Southwark, where (as it was afterwards told to us) it was very well accepted and approved by the great ones there.²⁰⁸

The following day, 16th November, the Council of Officers sent the King proposals for a permanent constitutional settlement. No one can have thought he would accept it and indeed he did not.

When Cromwell had written to Hammond on the 6th November recommending a purge of Parliament he said nothing of the fate of the King. But by the 20th November, when he forwarded a collection of four regimental petitions to Fairfax, he wrote that, 'I find a very great sense in the officers... for the sufferings of the poor kingdom, and in them all a very great zeal to have impartial justice done upon offenders; and I must confess I do in all, from my heart, concur with them, and I verily think and am persuaded they are things which god puts into our hearts'.²⁰⁹ One of the petitions that Cromwell sent to Fairfax was from his own regiment. It demanded that 'impartial Justice may be done upon them [the contrivers of the late Rebellions], according to the many Petitions to that purpose, especially that large Petition of Sept. 11

²⁰⁷ J Rushworth, 'Proceedings in Parliament from November 1 to December 1, 1648', pp. 1281-1314.

²⁰⁸ J Lilburne, *Legall and Fundamental Liberties*, W Haller and G Davies, *The Leveller Tracts 1647-1653*, p. 417.

²⁰⁹ *Several Petitions Presented to his Excellency the Lord Fairfax...together with Lieut. Gen. Cromwells Letter to his Excellency concerning the same* (1648). E474[5].

1648...'. The Petitions from the other three regiments~Harrison's, Pride's and Deane's~also contained explicit statements of support for the Levellers' Large Petition.²¹⁰

There followed a flurry of meetings between the Levellers and the radical Independents to conclude the final formulations of the *Remonstrance*. A large meeting of Leveller Agents agreed it in London. Lilburne and Henry Marten were in conference with Ireton and other Independents at the Garter Inn in Windsor. Then, on the 20th November, *A Remonstrance or Declaration of the Army* was presented to the House of Commons by Colonel Ewres and six other Colonels and Captains, the same day that the *Remonstrance* from Rainsborough's regiment appeared. Its first demand, printed on its front page, was 'that King Charles, as the Capitall Grand Author of the late troubles, may be speedily brought to Justice'.²¹¹ When it was presented to the House, reported *Mercurius Militaris*, 'the very reading of it sweld the spleens of most of the House, and it was even white with the foaming of their indignation, their countenance and their brains run too and fro like shutters, but what Cobwebs they will weave, either to cover their shame, or hide themselves from Justice'.²¹²

The *Remonstrance* was to open the final act of the revolution and it was a result of co-operation between Independents and the Levellers. The period between the freeing of John Lilburne from the Tower in August 1648 and Pride's Purge in December 1648 marks the period of closest effective co-operation between the Levellers and the radical Independents. The same period also covers the death and funeral of Thomas Rainsborough. Rainsborough's death and funeral are just one thread in this wider tapestry, but this thread does, nevertheless, carry its own significance.

In the first place Rainsborough's death added fuel to the argument that Charles and his party were irreconcilable. Rainsborough's death was, to those opposed to a Treaty with Charles, an additional reason why no such agreement could or should be reached. The Levellers were the

²¹⁰ *Several Petitions Presented to his Excellency the Lord Fairfax...together with Lieut. Gen. Cromwells Letter to his Excellency concerning the same*, pp. 3,6-7. I Gentles, *The New Model Army*, p. 268.

²¹¹ *A Remonstrance or Declaration of the Army: presented to the House of Commons on Munday Novemb.20.1648* (London). E473[3].

²¹² *Mecurius Militaris*, November 14 to November 21 1648 (London). E473[8].

practical party most opposed to an agreement with Charles, whatever Lilburne's tactical reservations about the execution of the King. Without the weight of the Levellers cast into the balance it is unlikely that Ireton could have carried the day among the officers to break with the King and to open the road to Pride's Purge. Leveller agitation, both generally and within the Army, added significant social weight and political clarity to the cause of the radical wing of the revolution. Rainsborough's funeral procession was an impressive physical manifestation of this fact. And it occurred at the absolutely critical moment when the future development of the revolution hung in the balance.

Conclusion

The year 1648 was the critical year of the English revolution. Leveller organisation was at its height. The political crisis of 1648 amplified the impact of Leveller organisation and enabled them to affect the course of national politics. Rainsborough's death was an event in which these tensions were exposed. His funeral displayed Leveller strength at a strategically vital moment. In the immediate aftermath of the funeral the Levellers, Ireton and Cromwell constructed a political alliance which paved the way for Pride's Purge and the execution of the King. Perhaps the political basis among the Independents for the alliance was best expressed some years later by Major General Robert Overton in answer to those who accused him of being a Leveller:

That if a leveller be one, who bears affection to anarchy, destroying propriety or government, then I am none. But if upon the account of New-market and other engagements, for the setting of a well grounded government, redress of grievances; civil, ecclesiastical, or military, or inflicting condign punishment upon capital offenders, &c. if this be levelling, I was and am a leveller.²¹³

The forces brought together in that alliance united for different reasons and its construction therefore required considerable effort on both sides. Its results were significantly different from the expectations of both sides. But if the alliance had not been constructed it is likely that events would have resulted in a defeat for both the Levellers and the Independents: the 're-inthroning'

²¹³ *A collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe*, Vol. 3: December 1654 -August 1655 (1742) pp. 110-111.

of the King. Leveller activity was important in avoiding the counter-revolution that threatened through much of 1648. The Republic was not the revolution the Levellers desired, but it could not have happened without their actions.

Chapter 6

Leveller martyrs and political persecution

This analysis of the relationship between the state and the Levellers is primarily concerned with recalling the degree of force used against the Levellers, the conditions under which force was used, the political purpose of the Levellers' opponents in using such force, and the Levellers' reaction to such persecution. Examining these aspects of the state's attitude to the Levellers can reveal both the level of political organisation among Leveller supporters and the changing relationship between the Levellers and other forces in the parliamentary camp.

At the most elementary level we need to recover from beneath the patina of time the physical and mental impact of imprisonment, let alone execution or the threat of execution, on those who endured it and their supporters. Punishment in this context was meant to prevent political activity and to humiliate and silence opponents. But punishment could vary as could the conditions of imprisonment. Henry Marten's post-restoration detention in Chepstow Castle allowed him to live with his common law wife, entertain guests and go for walks. Lilburne was sometimes allowed to be 'at liberty' from the Tower in something approaching the modern notion of being 'tagged'. Jails were privately run, not state institutions: the Gatehouse prison in Westminster was run by the Abbey, Newgate was run by its Warden. Jail conditions were also dependent on how much you could pay the jailor and the generosity of friends. Katherine Hadley, John Lilburne's servant jailed for her assistance to him in his first imprisonment, had to pay 'twelve pence a week for he lodging' in the Bridewell, and even then she was 'churlishly

used by the matron, and put among the common sluts whose society is hell on earth to one that fears the Lord'.¹

At times the authorities could inflict brutal physical punishment, detention without trial and 'close imprisonment'. So when John Rushworth wrote of John Lilburne's treatment he said 'That Imprisonment is a Man buried alive... There is an end when Life is taken away, but in this no end'. And he went on to note that 'Close Imprisonment was never used to the Primitive Christians by any Tyrant... a Close Imprisonment may presume a Famishment, and so Death. The Romans had four Punishments, *Lapidatio*, *Combustio*, *Decollatio*, and *Strangulatio*, but never famishing to death. This Man might have been so, as it was sworn'.² It was on this brute experience of persecution that all political appeals by the Levellers, all condemnation of those who imprisoned or executed them, were based.

Two general aspects of the political situation in the 1640s should be borne in mind throughout. Firstly, if one definition of a state is that it is able to exercise the sole legitimate use of force in a given geographical area, then the conditions of civil war are ones in which state power has broken down. This situation had more than one effect on the leading figures of the Leveller movement. At times~John Lilburne's release by the Long Parliament from his first imprisonment for instance~the disruptive effect of revolution on state power can lessen repression. At other times~during the Ware mutiny in 1647 for instance~the revolutionary process makes the use of force a closely contested issue between rival political forces. Secondly, the civil war was one of the most bloody experiences in British history. The levels of death and injury that resulted from the battles between the opposing sides seems to have made those within the Parliamentary camp less willing to tolerate violence among politically opposed forces on their own side. The general sense that the Parliamentary forces were not a mercenary army but a force whose cohesion rested, at least in part, on religious conviction and political purpose placed a barrier in the path of the untrammelled exercise of violent military discipline. This

¹ 'Petition of Katherine Hadley, 21 Dec. 1641' HMC, *Fourth Report* (1874), pp. 33-34.

² J Rushworth, *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State*: Vol. 2: 1629-38 (1721), pp. 461-481. The four punishments were stoning, burning, beheading and strangulation.

made the issue of military discipline a contentious one, especially when the fighting came to a halt. The Levellers were at pains to argue that soldiers should not be under martial law but common law when there was peace. And then, inevitably in a rapidly changing civil war, there were former soldiers still engaged in political activity in the Army. As we shall see in his dealings with the Burford mutineers, Fairfax was sensible to this distinction.

Pre-revolution Puritan martyrs

The tradition of Puritan martyrdom is much longer and deeper than the Levellers' political usage. John Lilburne recalled during his first imprisonment that he, like many Puritans of his generation, had read John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*.³ It had long since become a significant part of national consciousness. Since its original publication in 1563 it had run to many editions, been abridged and its contents reproduced in broadsheets and ballads. Its anti-papist message was gathering a new urgency during the crisis of Laud's rule. But Foxe's was not the only literature of this kind. In 1639 John Taylor produced his own *Booke of Martyrs*.⁴ The Lollards, Luther, Calvin, William Tyndale, Thomas Cromwell, Bishops Latimer and Ridley are all celebrated. The glory of Elizabethan Protestantism is trumpeted, the virtues of James I enumerated and the 'damn'd powder plot' cursed. And that is, significantly perhaps, where Taylor's long litany of praise, and the poem, end.⁵ Charles I's rule is not mentioned. This is a telling if necessary omission since the public to which this book was likely to appeal were well aware that Puritan martyrs were still being created in the 1630s.

John Lilburne's entrance on the political stage was as an understudy to the Puritan martyrs Henry Burton, John Bastwick and William Prynne. As a young apprentice in London in the 1630s he absorbed the message of opposition to the Laudian church and its Bishops, accused of putting themselves beyond the reach of the law, of sheltering behind the Royal prerogative and riding roughshod over the liberties of the subject. In 1624 and again in 1637 control over printing was tightened and invested in the hands of two Archbishops, the Bishop of London

³ J Lilburne, *The Poor Mans Cry* (London, 1639) p. 5.

⁴ J Taylor, *The Booke of Martyrs* (London, 1639).

⁵ J Taylor, *The Booke of Martyrs*, 'The Second Booke' (London, 1639) no pagination.

and the Vice Chancellors of Oxford and Cambridge. No foreign book could be imported without approval. Similarly so with any reprinted book.⁶ But secret Puritan presses and the importation of tracts from Holland continued to furnish the reading appetite of the godly.

In the mid-1630s Lilburne was already moving in these circles. He was an associate of William Kiffin, soon to be a key figure in the gathered churches of London. Another close associate, the preacher Edmund Rosier, introduced Lilburne to John Bastwick in 1636. They met in the Gatehouse Prison where Bastwick was being kept for printing anti-episcopal tracts in 1633-34. Lilburne made many subsequent visits to Bastwick. And this growing friendship led to another with William Prynne. From the later 1620s through the early 1630s Prynne had repeatedly attacked the Bishops in print. In his *Histrio-Mastix* of 1633 he attacked stage plays and actors. This was taken as an attack on the Court. Prynne was hauled before the Star Chamber in 1634. He was deprived of his academic degrees, his living as a lawyer in Lincoln's Inn, and a considerable fine. More seriously, he was deprived of his ears while in the pillory and then his freedom for life by imprisonment in the Tower. Lilburne was a frequent visitor to Prynne. As he wrote later, 'I accounted in my duty to do William Prynne and Dr Bastwick all the free offices of love and service that lay in my power, during all the time that I conceived they stood either for God, Goodnesse or Justice'.⁷

Prynne continued his attacks on the Bishops from his imprisonment. In March 1637 he was back before the Star Chamber, this time with Burton and Bastwick for company. On the 14th June they were all convicted of seditious writing, fined £5,000 each, sentenced to life imprisonment at, the authorities hoped, the safe distances of Lancaster for Prynne, Launceston for Bastwick and Carnarvon for Burton. All three were to lose their ears. In the case of Prynne this meant the removal of the stumps that remained after his first mutilation. He also had the letters SL, for Seditious Libeller, branded on his cheek. While they were in the pillory it was obvious, at least to the perspicacious Venetian Ambassador, that public sympathy was with the victims:

⁶ M A Gibb, *John Lilburne, The Leveller* (London, Lindsay Drummond, 1947) pp. 39-40.

⁷ J Lilburne, *Innocency and Truth Justified* (London, 1646) p. 7. E314[22].

The king, seeing this poison spreading, tries to keep it far from his heart and to pull out its roots, but the more he tries to extirpate them the stronger they become. They do not care about their goods or esteem their lives when efforts are made to moderate their doctrines, or rather their ignorance. When the sentence in question was being executed, one could see even women and children collecting the blood of the victims, exalting their punishment and ignominy with tears and cries to the most exalted martyrdom. In short this pest may be the one which will ultimately disturb the repose of this kingdom.⁸

The living martyr: John Lilburne

John Lilburne was around 20 years old at the time of the persecution of Burton, Bastwick and Prynne. He was apprenticed to clothier Thomas Hewson, a friend of the Winthrop family.⁹ Lilburne was about to undergo a formative experience. And the pattern of this experience~defiance of authority, imprisonment and torture, legal challenge backed by popular protest, vindication and popular acclaim~was to be repeated until his death some 20 years later. Lilburne was so close to the martyrs, and known by the authorities to be so, that he found it prudent to fly to Holland in the summer of 1637. Lilburne seems to have had it in mind to have Bastwick's English language tirade against episcopacy, the *Letany*, printed in Holland for distribution in England. His associates in this scheme were Edmund Chillenden, a button seller from Cannon Street, and John Chilliburne, a servant to another Puritan martyr, John Wharton. Chillenden was meant to distribute the pamphlets but was arrested and the contraband seized. To save himself, Chillenden gave up Lilburne's name.

Chilliburne was even less trustworthy than Chillenden. When Lilburne returned to London in December 1637 he was wary enough to go about armed. But by Chilliburne's treachery he was seized by agents of Archbishop Laud on Tuesday 11 December.¹⁰ Lilburne was pushed into a shop, held over a sugar-chest and his sword taken from him. His captors were overjoyed at

⁸ 'Venice: July 1637', *Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice*, Vol. 24: 1636-1639 (1923), pp. 234-250.

⁹ M Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints* (Cambridge, CUP, 1977) p. 36.

¹⁰ J Lilburne, *A Coppy of a Letter Written...to the Wardens of the Fleet* (1640) p. 10.

having taken ‘one of the most notoriousest dispersers of scandalous bookes that was in the kingdom’. Lilburne’s account of his capture, published in 1641, contained a foreword by William Kiffin. It was printed by future Leveller printer William Larner who Lilburne had probably met through Kiffin in the 1630s.¹¹

Lilburne found himself back in the familiar surroundings of the Gatehouse prison, not this time as a visitor to Bastwick but as a prisoner in his own right. Lilburne also found himself before the Star Chamber, a court without a jury in which the examination of the defendant was the primary method of obtaining a conviction. Lilburne refused co-operation with the court in every particular: he objected that he had not been subpoenaed, that he could not afford the clerk of the court’s fee, and finally, he refused to take the oath until he had time to consider its ‘lawfulness’.¹² It was his refusal to bow to the court as a ‘free-born Englishman’ from which his popular nickname, Freeborn John, first derived.¹³ He was then told that he would be imprisoned until he conformed to court procedure, be fined £500 and suffer physical punishment.

Lilburne did not know what this punishment would be until on 18 April 1638 he was told by the prison porter that he was to be tied to the back of a cart and whipped from the Fleet Bridge to Westminster where he would then be put in the pillory. Lilburne claimed that the man who was to inflict this punishment told him that he had ‘whipped many a Rogue, but now I shall whip an honest man’. And so he did.¹⁴ On an unusually hot day Lilburne was lashed by a corded and knotted three thonged whip every three or four paces. After 500 blows Lilburne was dragged into New Palace Yard and put in the stocks. He had been supported by the crowd along the route and had periodically called out to them. But now, when the crowd was greatest, he began a full blown speech from the pillory. Invoking the memory of Bastwick, Burton and Prynne, Lilburne denounced the Star Chamber, the Court of High Commission, Archbishop

¹¹ J Lilburne, *Christian Man’s Triall* (London, 1641) p. 1.

¹² J Lilburne, *Christian Man’s Triall*, pp. 6-8.

¹³ J Rushworth, *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State: Volume 2*, pp. 461-481.

¹⁴ J Lilburne, *The Worke of the Beast* (Amsterdam, 1638) p. 5.

Laud and the ‘prelates’ and their abuse of authority.¹⁵ He refused to stop speaking and then his mouth was gagged so roughly that it bled. Lilburne then reached into his pockets and threw Bastwick’s pamphlets into the crowd.¹⁶ When this was done he continued to stamp his feet until the two hours allotted for his time in the pillory had passed. He was ordered back to the Fleet and as he went through the streets, Lilburne recorded, ‘a greate store of people stood all along to behold me, and many of them blessed God for enabling me to undergoe my sufferings with such cheerfulness and courage’.¹⁷ We can gain some insight into the political impact of Lilburne’s punishment from Rushworth’s reaction:

Whipping was painful and shameful, Flagellation for Slaves. In the Eleventh of Elizabeth, one Cartwright brought a Slave from Russia, and would scourge him, for which he was questioned; and it was resolved, That England was too pure an Air for Slaves to breath in. And indeed it was often resolved, even in Star-Chamber, That no Gentleman was to be whipt for any offence whatsoever; and his whipping was too severe...¹⁸

Even after the whipping Lilburne was again cross-questioned by the Star Chamber about his conduct, where he obtained the pamphlets, and which pamphlets they were.¹⁹

Lilburne was denied food, linen and medical treatment. He was kept in heavy chains in solitary confinement. Visitors were either denied access or beaten for their pains. His jailors sent assassins to murder him and he had to fight them off in a struggle that lasted two hours and almost cost him his hand. But, remarkably, Lilburne claims not only to have survived but also

¹⁵ J Rushworth, *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State*: Vol. 2: 1629-38, pp. 461-481. J Lilburne, *A Coppy of a Letter Written...to the Wardens of the Fleet* (1640) pp. 13-15.

¹⁶ J Rushworth, *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State*: Vol. 2: 1629-38, pp. 461-481. J Lilburne, *A Coppy of a Letter Written...to the Wardens of the Fleet* (1640) pp. 20, 23.

¹⁷ J Lilburne, *The Worke of the Beast* (Amsterdam, 1638) pp. 5-24. J Lilburne, *A Coppy of a Letter Written...to the Wardens of the Fleet* (1640) p. 24.

¹⁸ J Rushworth, *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State*: Vol. 2: 1629-38, pp. 461-481. In the same passage Rushworth drew attention to the Lilburne family’s gentry status, a point designed to make his treatment all the more unacceptable.

¹⁹ J Lilburne, *A Coppy of a Letter Written...to the Wardens of the Fleet* (1640) pp. 9-10. P Gregg, *Free-born John* (London, Dent, 1961) pp. 64-67.

managed to continue to smuggle out pamphlets describing his trial and imprisonment.²⁰ In the Whitsun holidays in 1639 Lilburne's pamphlet *A Cry for Justice* was 'thrown abroad in Moor Fields', an act for which Katherine Hadley was imprisoned. The *Christian Man's Triall* came out before his whipping. But even after this he produced *A Worke of the Beast* and *Come Out of Her My People* 'which I writ' Lilburne claimed 'when my hands were fettered together with Irons'. These and others were sent to Holland to be printed.²¹

Without the calling of the Long Parliament it is not easy to see the conditions under which Lilburne or Katherine Hadley could have obtained their freedom.²² But Lilburne's petition for redress was referred to a committee that included John Pym, John Hampden, Denzil Holles, and Oliver St John. Oliver Cromwell, also a member of the committee, made his first speech in the Long Parliament in defence of Lilburne. On the 4 May 1641 the Commons voted that his Star Chamber sentence was 'illegal and against the liberty of the subject' as well as 'bloody, wicked, barbarous and tyrannical'. Reparations were ordered, although they took four years to be granted. Lilburne was a national political figure who had attracted the support of the most powerful moving forces of parliamentary politics and a significant degree of popular support.

Lilburne's subsequent actions in the first phase of the revolution enhanced this already considerable reputation. He had already helped to organise a demonstration of apprentices from his prison cell. He was now at the heart of the crowds that gathered at Westminster. As we have seen, he had seen off the Kings nominee to become Lieutenant of the Tower, Thomas Lunsford, with a group of armed apprentices. When war came Lilburne's actions in rallying retreating troops at Brentford, his subsequent capture and imprisonment by the Royalists at Oxford, the Commons vote to execute Royalist prisoners if Lilburne were killed, Elizabeth

²⁰ J Lilburne, *The Poor Mans Cry* (London, 1639) pp. 4, 8, 10-13.

²¹ 'Petition of Katherine Hadley, 21 Dec. 1641', pp. 33-34, which confirms Lilburne's account of his imprisonment. J Lilburne, *A Coppy of a Letter Written...to the Wardens of the Fleet* (1640) pp. 2-6. P Gregg, *Free-born John*, pp. 69-70. Possibly indicating that he was not under 'close imprisonment' for the whole time.

²² As Rushworth noted, 'Three years Imprisonment till the Parliament released him, and might otherwise have been for ever'. J Rushworth, *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State*: Vol. 2: 1629-38, pp461-481. 'Cath. Hadley discharged out of Bridewell', *Journal of the House of Lords*, Vol. 4: 1629-42 (1767-1830), pp. 113-114.

Lilburne's last moment ride to Oxford to bring this news before her husband was killed, were all events which enhanced Lilburne's reputation among soldiers as well as civilians.

Lilburne's rhetoric never lost the dimension of religiously inspired resistance to persecution. But, as the experience of participation in the civil war and the revolutionary mass movement accumulated, other themes emerged. The notion of freedom and equality under and in the law quickly became a central concern. Joined to this was the matter of legal precedent and, to demonstrate this, Lilburne relied on copious citation of Coke's *Institutes*. Then there was the historical argument that this notion of freedom had been lost under the Norman Yoke. And as experience accumulated there was an increasing reliance on citing the Long Parliament's and the Army's previous acts and engagements as a precedent for Leveller actions. Lilburne even began to show an interest in classical Republican thought in the 1650s.²³ Lilburne could certainly be both rash and harsh on friends as well as enemies. But he could also be generous, as when he offered to pay for the publication of Henry Marten's reply to his complaints against him for not pursuing his release from prison. And Lilburne had a sense of humour, probably more evident to those who met him than to historians. It was Henry Marten's joke that 'That if there were none living but himself, John would be against Lilburne, and Lilburne against John'. But in a self-deprecating moment Lilburne repeated the joke against himself as if it were his own in *The Just Defence of John Lilburne*.²⁴

Lilburne's early career allowed him to develop his capacity to use the court and the prison as a political platform. He had need of this skill. In the 20 years between 1637 and 1657 there were only four years in which Lilburne did not spend some time behind bars. From the mid-1640s, as D Alan Orr notes, 'Lilburne either wrote from his prison cell or under the imminent threat of arrest and imprisonment'.²⁵ His bravery commended him to many who were not wholly

²³ R Foxley, *The Levellers, radical political thought in the English Revolution* (Manchester, MUP, 2013), Ch. 6.

²⁴ J Rushworth, *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State*: Vol. 2: 1629-38, pp. 461-481. J Lilburne, *The Just Defence of John Lilburne* in A L Morton (ed.) *Freedom in Arms* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1975) p. 323. The same joke was repeated in popular rhyme of 1657, see E Bernstein, *Cromwell and Communism* (Nottingham, Spokesman, 1980) p. 162. For Lilburne's original complaint see J Lilburne, *A Copy of a Letter Written to Collonel Henry Marten* (London, 1647). 669 f.11[46].

²⁵ D Alan Orr, 'Law, liberty and the English Civil War: John Lilburne's prison experience, the Levellers and freedom', in M J Braddick and D L Smith, *The Experience of Revolution in Stuart Britain and Ireland*

sympathetic to his cause. And Lilburne was mindful of the need to present his suffering as an example of wider social injustice. But all of this could only have the effect it did because Lilburne had organised access to print. Perhaps this effect is nowhere better demonstrated than in Overton's *Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens* of 1646 where he uses a montage technique in engraving prison bars over the original portrait of Lilburne that had appeared on the front of the 1641 *Christain Man's Triall*. This illustration simultaneously drew a parallel between Lilburne's persecution under the Bishops and his persecution by Presbyterians and also recalled Lilburne's long record of resistance since his first fame. But all the pamphlets and petitions that flowed from Lilburne's pen, even from the closest imprisonment, were a political intervention which merely personal resistance to injustice in prison and court room could not have achieved. Lilburne's earliest Leveller-to-be associate was the printer William Larner, who produced the *Christian Man's Triall*. It was an association deeply rooted in the Puritan underground and networks in the City. It lasted until Lilburne's death. It was one of the nodal points around which the Leveller movement would emerge.

The martyred dead

All those identified with the Leveller cause who lost their lives were serving in the Army. All but Rainsborough were shot for mutiny under martial law. The importance that the state gave to suppressing Leveller activity when they found it a threat to the unity of the army should not be underestimated. Cromwell was personally present at the suppression of all three major Leveller mutinies~Ware, the Lockyer mutiny and Burford.²⁶ So was Fairfax. And John Lilburne, at least on some occasions, claimed significant influence in the army. He wrote to Fairfax at the time of Ware 'I made a vigorous and strong attempt on the private soldiery of your Army, and with abundance of study and pains and the expense of some scores of pounds, I brought my just,

(Cambridge, CUP, 2011) p. 155. Alan Orr argues that 'Lilburne's view of liberty derived increasingly from the actual experience of being constrained behind prison walls', p. 155.

²⁶ Mark Kishlansky questions whether Cromwell personally led the officers into the ranks to remove the *Agreement of the People* from the soldiers' hats at Ware on the basis that only secondary contemporary sources record this action. He cites evidence that Cromwell was at the Ware rendezvous but seeks to interpret this to mean that he was not in the field at the time the mutiny was crushed. M Kishlansky, 'What Happened at Ware?', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Dec., 1982), pp. 827-839.

honest and lawful intentions by my agents, instruments and interests to a good ripeness'.²⁷ On the 6th October 1647, more than a month before Ware, *Mercurius Pragmaticus* reported: 'What Lilburne says must be done, the adjutators will do'. And a month later it reinforced the point: 'John keeps a weekly rendezvous in the way of edification over Capen and Cook-broth, at close meetings with the venerable agents and ambassadors from the high and mighty adjutators, who if they could once be weaned from that learned opinion that monarchical government is Anti-Christian, are resolved to have no King but John; and then we shall have a John a London as famous as John a Leyden'.²⁸

The extent of Leveller influence in the Army is much debated. Mark Kishlansky has drawn a more or less absolute distinction between radicalisation of the Army and the Levellers: the Army 'was insulated from the Leveller programme by its determination not to meddle in matters of state and developed its own unique set of grievances and desires'. From a different perspective John Morrill and Philip Baker have noted that in certain important cases Leveller influence may have been less than previously thought and the roots of radicalisation were independent of their influence.²⁹ But Fairfax's letter to the Commons after Ware directly attributed to the 'London agents' an important part in the mutiny in both Harrison's and Robert Lilburne's Regiments. On this news the Lords ordered that 'a Committee shall examine who are the London Agents mentioned in the Generalls letter'.³⁰ Jason Peacey has argued that it was at the time of the Ware mutiny that the Levellers 'honed their technique for reaching out to, and securing support from, the political nation beyond London, and far beyond their natural support base'. Others, most recently Rachel Foxley, have also suggested a continually renewed

²⁷ M A Gibb, *John Lilburne*, p. 209.

²⁸ M A Gibb, *John Lilburne*, pp. 209-210. *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, 28 September-6th October and 9th-16th October 1647. 'John a Leyden' was a familiar derogatory term deployed by heresy-hunters such as Thomas Edwards.

²⁹ M A. Kishlansky, 'The Army and the Levellers: The Roads to Putney', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Dec., 1979), p. 824. J Morrill and P Baker, 'The Case of the Armie Truly Re-stated' in M Mendle (ed.), *The Putney Debates of 1647* (Cambridge, CUP, 2001) pp. 103-125.

³⁰ *The Perfect Weekly Account*, 10-17 November 1647 (London), final page.

alliance of Army radicalism and Leveller organisation which ‘reverses the picture painted by standard revisionist historiography’.³¹

Part of the problem with the revisionist case is the artificial separation of ‘experience derived’ grievance and ‘external’ agitation. Of course no agitation succeeds unless it reflects genuine grievance. But by the same token internally generated unrest frequently requires political expression and often finds it in forms that have been pre-developed and articulated by broader political forces in the society at large. And, in any case, it is not true that the Levellers were completely ‘external’ to the Army. In some senses they were internal to and shaped Army radicalism. This is true in at least three senses. Firstly, Leveller pamphlets and petitions circulated widely and parts of the Army had adopted these ideas as their own. Richard Baxter complained:

A great part of the mischief they did among the soldiers was by pamphlets which they abundantly dispersed; such as R. Overton’s *Martin Mar-Priest*, and more of his, and some of J. Lilburne’s, who was one of them; and divers against the King, and against the ministry, and for liberty of conscience, &c. And soldiers being usually dispersed in their quarters, they had such books to read when they had none to contradict them.³²

Secondly, the reputation of the Levellers was considerable and they had the sympathy of some troops. In April 1647 a letter from Suffolk complained that ‘Lilburne’s books are quoted by them as statute law’.³³ Thirdly, and critically, some Levellers were *of* the Army themselves. Lilburne had an exemplary and widely publicised military record. He is nearly always described by his military rank even after he left the Army. But Lilburne was not alone in this. Henry Marten had close engagement in military affairs in London and eventually raised his own regiment in Berkshire. Thomas Rainsborough was a Leveller sympathiser, who had been working with

³¹ J Peacey, ‘The People of the Agreements: The Levellers, Civil War Radicalism and Political Participation’ in P Baker and E Vernon (eds.) *The Agreement of the People, The Levellers and the Constitutional Crisis of the English Revolution* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2012) p. 53. R Foxley, *The Levellers, radical political thought in the English Revolution* (Manchester, MUP, 2013) p. 158.

³² A S P Wodehouse, *Puritanism and Liberty* (London, Dent, 1938) p. 389.

³³ Quoted in C Hill and E Dell, *The Good Old Cause, The English Revolution of 1640-1660* (London, Frank Cass, 1969) p. 344.

Lilburne since at least July 1647.³⁴ Edward Sexby was a central figure in the actions of the Agitators. Army chaplain Edward Harrison supported the Levellers. William Allen served in Holles regiment. William Larnier served as a sutler in Lord Robartes regiment. John Harris ran an Army printing press with Henry Hills who had already fought as a musketeer at Edgehill. Hills later joined the cavalry and fought at Worcester in 1651.³⁵ Major Tulidah was a Leveller supporter. Thomas Prince fought in the London Trained Bands until he was injured at Newbury in 1643. Major Thomas Scot led the Ware mutiny. Bartholemew Symonds was prominent at Ware and later shot. Captain Francis White was ‘an unswerving Leveller’. Tobias Box was an agitator in Butler’s regiment. John Radman was a Leveller and an agitator in Ingoldsby’s regiment. Lieutenant Colonel John Rede was a Leveller, remembered even after the Restoration as a ‘violent Republican’.³⁶ This list is indicative but far from exhaustive. It does not include most of the figures directly involved in the following account of the mutinies.

The extent to which the rise of Agitators in 1647 provided the future Levellers with a model, and direct experience, of widespread and effective political organisation should not be underestimated. Sexby’s directions for ‘Managing the Councils of the Army’ from May 1647 is a devastating series of organisational measures for radical political work. From initiating committees to running printing presses, from keeping in correspondence with ‘wel-affected friends’ around the country to avoiding delay in action, from preventing disbandment to the importance of framing arguments ‘for the good of the people’~Sexby’s advice is sophisticated, practical and clear.³⁷ The Agitators represented a substantial, new and effective political force erupting into the political scene. Over 80 officers and some 229 named Agitators or

³⁴ J Lilburne, *An Impeachment of High Treason Against Oliver Cromwel...* (London, 1649) p. 55. R W Stent, *Thomas Rainsborough and the Army Agitators* (University of London thesis, M.Phil, 1975) Vol. 1, p. 94.

³⁵ *A view of part of the many Traiterous, Disloyal and Turn-about Actions of H H Senior* (1684). Wing (CD-Rom) V359. I Gadd, ODNB.

³⁶ R W Stent, *Thomas Rainsborough and the Army Agitators*, Vol. 2, pp. 269-273, 331, 342, 345. On John Rede, BL, Stowe MS. 189 f. 53, ‘Articles against Rede exhibited by Poole, 29 March 1651’ and Stowe MS. 189 f. 74, ‘An Abridgement of M. Scott’s Confession and Discovery of his Transactions made immediately after the Restoration in 1660’.

³⁷ C H Firth (ed.), *Clarke Papers*, Vol. I (London, Royal Historical Society, 1992) pp. 22-24.

sympathisers of the Agitators who were not officers have been identified by R W Stent. This compares with some 450 officers who sided with Parliament or whose views are not known.³⁸

An examination of the accounts of army payments from 1647 to 1650 underlines the degree to which Sexby's recommendations were reflected in practice and, critically, of Leveller involvement in them. The records show payments to Agitators, although the word is later crossed through or replaced by another term. Something in excess of £1,800 is paid to unnamed and named Agitators between June 1647 and May 1649, although there are only four payments after May 1648. There are some group payments such as the £96 paid to the 'Agitators towards their charges at Putney'. Of the 15 named individuals receiving payment at least eight are Levellers: Chillenden, Allen, Sexby, Bray, Rede, Tulidah, and printers Hills and Harris. Two of these payments, those to Bray and Tulidah, are for arrears. Of those named Agitators who are paid more than once all are Levellers except for Cornet Joyce, paid the substantial sum of £100 for 'extra charges' in the week after he seized the King at Holdenby House in June 1647. Remarkably since he had left the army in 1645 John Lilburne is also paid £10 in August 1647, sent to him by army messenger. A number of payments are for printing, including a payment of £9 to 'Mr. Hills printer for 5000 of the Agreement' in February 1649.³⁹

Right at the beginning of the Ware mutiny we see just the kind of interaction between Leveller organisation and internally arising revolt that we might expect from this general description. Captain William Bray was an Army veteran, a confederate of Edward Sexby and John Lilburne and a supporter of the *Agreement of the People*.⁴⁰ According to his account the mutiny, which began at Dunstable, was a powerful elemental revolt. But interestingly he suggested to the mutinying troops 'That the way to get the Regiment to march, was to send a faire letter to the

³⁸ R W Stent, *Thomas Rainsborough and the Army Agitators*, Vol. 2, pp. 252-349.

³⁹ E Kitson and E K Clark, 'Some Civil War Accounts, 1647-1650', *Thoresby Society Publications*, Vol. II, Miscellanea IV (Leeds, 1904) pp. 137-235. The payment to Rede is for troops in Poole and may not be directly related to Agitator activity. Some sense of the value of the amounts paid can be got by comparing them to the other multitude of payments listed, like the £6 paid to the tent-keeper for two months work on 10th October 1648. Jason Peacey suggests this payment to Hill is for printing the Officers' Agreement, private communication.

⁴⁰ W Bray, *A Representation to the Nation* (London, 1648). W Bray, *A Letter to the General* (London, nd, but probably 1649) pp. 4-6. W Bray, *Innocency and the Blood of the slain Souldiers* (London, 1649) pp. 11, 17. W Bray, *A Letter to His Excellencie Sir Thomas Fairfax* (London, 1647) p. 3.

Agents from the five Regiments of Horse, and to get an Order from them'.⁴¹ This shows a degree of connection with the new Agitators elected under Lilburne's influence. Bray was arrested when the mutinous regiment appeared on the field at Ware. He was the only officer still with the soldiers. He obviously enjoyed support among the troops who on a later occasion in 1649 petitioned for his release, citing their support for the Levellers.⁴²

Colonel William Eyre was one of the key Leveller figures at Ware. Eyre was a returning New Englander, had enjoyed the political protection of Skippon in London before the civil war, rallied retreating troops at Edgehill, had like Lilburne fought at Brentford, and had been made a Quartermaster and then a Captain of, and recruited the godly for, Cromwell's regiment. He was an advocate of the full Leveller programme, lambasting the Norman Yoke and calling for representative democracy.⁴³ Eyre was an ally of Henry Marten and his name is in the list of ciphers that Marten kept from around this time, alongside those of Wildman, Walwyn, Petty and Rainsborough, indicating a trusted network of close collaborators. The code is largely designed to communicate information about the Army.⁴⁴ Eyre and Bray co-operated in petitioning Fairfax at the time of the Ware mutiny to discover the source of a rumour that the Levellers intended to kill the King, a rumour that Bray thought was aimed at trying to get the 'Cavallrie to joyn to destroy the Levellers...'. A rumour Charles seemed to endorse in a pamphlet that contained the first printed naming of the Levellers.⁴⁵

At Ware with Fairfax 'coming into the field, Col. Eyers, Major Scot, and others, were observed to be insinuating divers seditious Principles into the Soldiers, and incensing them against the

⁴¹ *The Justice of the Army...* (London, 1649) p. 4.

⁴² J Naylier, *The Foxes Craft Discovered* (London, 1649) pp. 6-7.

⁴³ W Eyre, *The Serious Representation of Col. William Eyre* (1649). E394[5A]. P Gregg, *Free-born John*, p. 222.

⁴⁴ British Library, *Henry Marten Papers*, Add. MS. 71532. f.23. Most of the cipher refers to general terms ('Ammunition', 'Troops') or named Regiments. Named individuals fall into two categories. One is prominent individuals: The King and Army leaders like Cromwell, Ireton and Fairfax. Of the others only Colonel Overton is not a Leveller supporter. The rest are all Levellers: Marten himself (code letter O), Wildman (A), Walwyn (B), 'Petter' presumably Maximillian Pettus or Petty (E), Rainsborough (W) and Eyres (AA). On Maximillian Petty's inclusion see *ODNB*.

⁴⁵ W Bray, *Innocency and the Blood of the slain Souldiers* (London, 1649) p. 11. On the rumours of a plot to kill the King see *Mercurius Melancholicus*, 13-20 November 1647, p69. *Mercurius Elencticus*, 12-19 November 1647 (London) p. 17. E416[13]. *His Majesties Most Gracious Declaration* (1647). E413[15]. I Gentles, *The New Model Army* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1992) p. 220.

General and General Officers'. Eyre and Scot were immediately arrested.⁴⁶ Rainsborough 'rode from division to division exhorting the men to stand firm'. Then Rainsbrough and some others presented a petition and the *Agreement of the People* to Fairfax.⁴⁷ Fairfax read his own declaration at the head of the regiments. This directly blamed the Agitators 'guided by divers private persons that are not of the army' for spreading 'falsehoods and scandals...in Print' about the army high command. Fairfax threatened to resign his commission if the revolt was not ended. But he was also careful to try and take the sting from Leveller propaganda by announcing that he might still 'order one general rendezvous', that army declarations would be adhered to, that 'constant pay', arrears, indemnity, 'freedom from pressing', care for injured soldiers and compensation for apprentices who had left their craft to serve, would all be addressed. General political demands were also to be met: there would be 'a period set for this present Parliament', there would be 'freedome and equality of Elections thereto', and the Army would 'mediate' with Parliament 'for the redresse of the common grievances of the people'.⁴⁸

Then Fairfax began to confront the troops. Harrison's Regiment and Robert Lilburne's Regiment, 'the most mutinous Regiment in the Army' according to William Clarke, were the core of the revolt.⁴⁹ Harrison's troops had papers in 'their Hats with this Motto on the outside in capital Letters, England's Freedom, and Soldiers Rights' but Fairfax persuaded them to remove them. Leveller William Allen was said to have persuaded them to mutiny.⁵⁰ Robert Lilburne's cavalry replied to demands that they 'take those papers from your hats' by shouting 'No, no'. At some point in the proceedings 'the Generall...came to them, attended them with his Officers, who commanded them to pull their papers out of their Hats, but they refused. Whereupon some Officers rode in among them, and plucked out the papers of some that were

⁴⁶ W Clark, prefatory note to *A full relation of the proceedings...* (1647) p. 5.

⁴⁷ 'To the Supream authority of England, the Commons in Parliament assembled...' (London, 1647). W Clark, prefatory note to *A full relation of the proceedings...* (1647) p6. *The Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer*, 16-23 May 1647 (London) p. 734.

⁴⁸ *A Remonstrance From His Excellency Sir Thomas Fairfax* (London, 1647).

⁴⁹ W Clark, prefatory note to *A full relation of the proceedings...* (1647) p. 5.

⁵⁰ W Clark, prefatory note to *A full relation of the proceedings...* (1647) p6. J Rushworth, 'Proceedings in Parliament, November 1st - December 4th, 1647', *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State*: Vol. 7: 1647-48 (1721), pp. 858-922. *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, 16-22 November 1647 (London) p. 74.

most insolent, and then the rest began to submit'.⁵¹ Contrary to Kishlansky's claim that Cromwell was not present on the field, Clarke reports, 'The Soldiers of this Regiment crying out, That they were abused by their Officers, and being told by the Lieutenant General, That they should have Justice against them, were very much satisfied, sensible of their error, and promised conformity to the Generals Commands for the future'. The seemingly eyewitness and certainly contemporary account in the Clarendon State Papers is definitive about Cromwell's role.⁵²

In the immediate aftermath a Council of War was called in the field and 'eight or nine' ring leaders were singled out and identified.⁵³ Then 'three of them were tryed and condemned to death, and one of them (whose turn it fell to by lot) was shot to death at the Head of the Regiment, and the others are in hold to be tried'.⁵⁴ Private Richard Arnold was the man shot by his two fellow soldiers. Parliament asked MP John Evelyn to write to Fairfax congratulating him on the execution of Arnold and encouraging him to 'bring such guilty Persons as he shall think fit to condign and exemplary Punishment'.⁵⁵

Ware did not happen in isolation but in the midst of a wave of agitation around the *Agreement of the People*, published on 3 November 1647. *Mercurius Rusticus* complained of Petitions 'framed in Army and sent abroad by the Agitators into those Counties and Cities' where they were taken up by Sectaries. Agitators in Ireton's regiment wrote to 'the Convention of Agents residing in London' in early November in terms indicating relatively widespread organisation. The letter speaks of Agitators in Hampshire and 'other counties' and encourages 'the City and County Agitators' to write to the 'souldiery at Southampton' and the inhabitants of Bristol, Weymouth, Exeter and Gloucester.⁵⁶ John Rede was made Governor of Poole on 11 November 1647 and,

⁵¹ *The Justice of the Army*... (London, 1649) p. 6.

⁵² W Clark, prefatory note to *A full relation of the proceedings...* (1647) pp. 5-6. R Scrope and T Monkhouse (eds.), *Clarendon State Papers*, (Oxford, 1767-86) Vol. 2, Appendix, p. xlii.

⁵³ *The Justice of the Army*... (London, 1649) p. 6.

⁵⁴ W Clark, prefatory note to *A full relation of the proceedings...* (1647) pp. 5-6. *Mercurius Elencticus*, 12-19 November 1647 (London) p. 19. E416[13].

⁵⁵ *Journal of the House of Commons*: Vol. 5: 1646-1648 (1802), pp. 366-368.

⁵⁶ 'A Copy of a Letter from Com.Gen. Regiment, to the Convention of Agents residing at London', Worcester College Oxford, Clarke Papers, MS. AA1.19/145. I'm very grateful to Elliot Vernon for making his transcript of this letter available to me.

in the early stages of his tenure, enjoyed considerable local support.⁵⁷ All this indicates a standing organisation of Agitators centred on London and the existence of civilian as well as Army agitators. No wonder the Commons ordered a committee to investigate the business of the 'London agents' who had 'fomented and abetted' the mutiny, 'thus indicating their belief that the London Levellers and the agitators were connected'.⁵⁸ There were meetings held in Mile End and papers 'dispersed upon and down the city' to gather weavers to march to Ware in support of the Leveller cause, though these plans were thwarted.⁵⁹ There were bills posted up 'in many Churches, and upon severall Gates and Ports throughout the City, inciting the People to rise as one Man, and free themselves from the Tyranny of their Task-Masters at Westminster'. Henry Marten was on his feet in the Commons defending those who did it. He was also meeting with 'above a hundred desperate Sectaries in a House in London'.⁶⁰ Royalists alleged that Marten and Rainsborough were meeting together at this time.⁶¹ Eyre, Bray, Scot and Rainsborough were supporters of the Levellers. We know, because William Clarke reported it to Parliament, that 'Lieut. Col. John Lilburne came this day to Ware; but things not succeeding at the Rendezvous according to expectation, came not further'.⁶² He did not play a direct part in events at Corkbush Field but waited for news nearby. Some reports also claim that Overton was at Ware.⁶³ We also know that Samuel Chidley was at Ware promoting the *Agreement of the People* among the mutinous troops. For his pains the House of Commons put him in gaol with

⁵⁷ 'A commission from General Fairfax', in H Ellis and F Douce (eds.) *A Catalogue of the Lansdowne Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, Record Commission, 1819) p. 222. Stowe MS. 189 f.44: Petition signed by about 150 people: 'We the Mayor, Justices, Burgesses, Townsmen and Natives, and Inhabitiants of the towne and county of Poole, doe unanimously, singly, and voluntarily, adhere to, assist, maintaine and joyne with the present Governour Leit. John Rede, his Officers and souldiers in the preservation of this Garrison, and castle of Brownsea, against all opposition, treachery, open force and violence whatsoever....'.

⁵⁸ *Mercurius Rusticus* (London, 1647) this edition contains no printed date but is annotated by Thomason as 12 November 1647 E414[5]. *Perfect Occurrences*, 12-19 November 1647 (London) p. 318. *Mercurius Elencticus*, 12-19 November 1647 (London) p. 24. E416[13]. P Gregg, *Free-born John* (London, 1961) p. 224.

⁵⁹ *A New Declaration from Eight Regiments in the Army* (London, 1647) pp. 2-3. MPs were also meeting with the weavers about their grievances at the same time, See *Perfect Occurrences*, 12-19 November 1647 (London) p. 317.

⁶⁰ *Mercurius Elencticus*, 12-19 November 1647 (London) pp20-21. E416[13].

⁶¹ A Tinniswood, *The Rainborowes, Pirates, Puritans and a family's Quest for the Promised Land* (London, 2013) p. 256.

⁶² W Clark, prefatory note to *A full relation of the proceedings...* (1647) p. 6.

⁶³ *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, 16-22 November 1647 (London) p. 73.

William Larnier.⁶⁴ His sojourn there was brief, because in January 1648 he was active in promoting the Levellers' Smithfield petition. It was a commonplace in the newsbooks and pamphlets that the Agitators were 'begotten of Lilburne (with Overtons help)...counselled by Walwin' and 'patronisd by Mr Martin'.⁶⁵

Leveller agitation after Ware insisted to the Commons 'Especially that you will make inquisition for the blood of that Soldier, viz. Richard Arnall of Col Lilburne's Regiment, which was shot to death neare Ware'.⁶⁶ Neither did Leveller influence in the Army end at Ware. Two months later, in January 1648, William Eyre met with about 80 officers at Broadway near Gloucester to discuss discontent in the Army. They had planned to seize the magazine at Gloucester and to take action in Ludlow, Hereford and Shrewsbury. Discontented citizens of London were said to be willing to 'furnish them with Morions', William Clarke wrote to Leveller Lieutenant Colonel John Rede. The Commons ordered that measures be taken to prevent these 'mischiefs'.⁶⁷

Robert Lockyer and the Bishopsgate mutiny

Thomas Rainsborough's and Robert Lockyer's funerals both provided occasions for a demonstration of Leveller support. Rainsborough's death and his funeral have been examined in chapter 5, but I will make some comparisons between the two funerals in the conclusion of this section. Robert Lockyer was 23 years old or thereabout in 1649. At 16 he had undergone adult baptism in Bishopsgate where he had been brought up. He served in Cromwell's Ironsides and followed them into Colonel Whalley's regiment of the New Model. Like Rainsborough and Sexby, he was a veteran of Naseby. Like Rainsborough he had been at Ware. And, again

⁶⁴ *To the Supream authority of England, the Commons in Parliament assembled...* (London, 1647).

⁶⁵ *The Character of an Agitator*, dated 11th November 1647, p7. See also *Mercurius Melancholicus*, 13-20 November 1647, p. 73.

⁶⁶ *To the Supream authority of England, the Commons in Parliament assembled...* (London, 1647).

⁶⁷ BL, Stowe MS. 189 f. 39-40, Letter of William Clarke to John Rede. Clarke adds a note asking Rede to give his regards to 'Mr. Lockyer', presumably Leveller and agitator Nicholas Lockyer not Robert Lockyer who, though a Leveller, was not an agitator. *Two Letters Read in the House of Commons* (London, 1648). On Clarke, see A Woolrych, *Soldiers and Statesmen, The General Council of the Army and its Debates* (Oxford, OUP, 1987) p. 325.

Journal of the House of Commons: Vol. 5: 1646-1648 (1802), pp. 441-442. William Eyres, ODNB. A R Bayley, *The Great Civil War in Dorset* (Taunton, Wessex Press, 1910) p. 331.

alongside Rainsborough, he had fought at the siege of Colchester. Whalley's regiment, with John Lilburne's encouragement, re-elected more radical agitators in September 1647.⁶⁸

On 24 April 1649 Lockyer was part of a mutiny in his regiment. The regiment was stationed around Bishopsgate when it was ordered out of London, part of a strategy by Army commanders 'to move some troops to...where they would be less subject to Leveller propaganda'.⁶⁹ The soldiers were owed arrears. Lockyer and about 30 other troopers went to the Four Swans Inn in Bishopsgate Street, seized the colours and took them to the Bull Inn, also in Bishopsgate Street. When their Captain arrived they told him that 'They were not his colours carriers' and 'That they, as well as he, had fought for them'.⁷⁰ The mutiny lasted into the following day, when some of the back pay was provided by the regiment's officers. Then a general rendezvous of the regiment was called for Mile End Green with the intention of at last getting the troopers out of the city. But the mutineers stayed fast, and 'put themselves into a posture of defence in Galleries of the Bull Inn, with their swords and pistols, standing upon their guard'.⁷¹ There was another unsuccessful attempt to take the colours, then loyal troopers and more senior officers of the regiment were brought down to the Bull to confront the mutineers. This too proved unsuccessful. 'And all the while they thus capitulated with their Officers, they stood drawn up in Galleries and Windows with their Swords and Pistols, as if they were treating with an enemy, and did not submit' and 'cried out for the Liberties of the people'.⁷² Finally Thomas Fairfax and Oliver Cromwell arrived on the scene just as 'the yard was clearing, to make way for the Horse and Foot to force them' to surrender.⁷³ Lockyer and 14 others were taken into custody. Some other mutineers were punished, but only Lockyer eventually faced the death penalty.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ A Southern, *Forlorn Hope. Soldier radicals of the Seventeenth Century* (Lewes, The Book Guild, 2001) pp. 73-77.

⁶⁹ I Gentles, *The New Model Army*, p. 326.

⁷⁰ *A True Narrative of the late Mutiny made by several Troopers of Captain Savage's Troop* (London, 1649) E552[18] p. 4.

⁷¹ *A True Narrative of the late Mutiny*, p. 6.

⁷² *The Impartiall Intelligencer*, No.29, 25 April-2 May (London, 1649) p. 69. E529[29].

⁷³ *The Justice of the Army...*(London, 1649) p. 13. *The Impartiall Intelligencer*, No.29, April 25th to May 2nd, p. 69.

⁷⁴ *A True Narrative of the late Mutiny*, p. 8-11.

Some accounts of the mutiny sympathetic to the Leveller cause claimed that Fairfax and Cromwell singled out Lockyer because he had participated in the Ware mutiny.⁷⁵ Certainly, in reply for demands for clemency, Fairfax said that he would not pardon Lockyer because of the volatile situation in the City and the Army.⁷⁶ Cromwell and Fairfax were facing more than Lockyer's mutiny during these days in late April. Three days of demonstrations by women supporters of the Levellers, the 'lusty lasses of the leveling party', were at the doors of Westminster. They were petitioning for the release of the Leveller leaders from captivity in the Tower. MPs were mobbed by 500 angry women, undeterred when the Sergeant-at-Arms was sent out to tell them to go home to 'look after their own business, and meddle with their huswifery'. In reply to a remark that it was strange to see women petitioning they replied that 'it was strange to that you cut off the King's head, yet I suppose you will justify it'. On 25th April, just as events at the Bulls Head were in motion, 20 women of the 'sea-green order' were admitted to Parliament to present a petition said to have 10,000 signatures. But they were rudely bundled out again by soldiers who cocked their pistols as if preparing to fire.⁷⁷

John Lilburne and Richard Overton petitioned Fairfax for mercy for Lockyer from their own imprisonment in the Tower. Cromwell had been inclined to leniency but Fairfax insisted on execution. Lockyer was taken to St Paul's Churchyard where he faced a firing squad. After saying his farewells to friends and family he refused a blindfold and addressed the soldiers. He said:

Fellow soldiers, I am here brought to suffer in behalf of the People of England, and for your Privileges and Liberties, and such as in conscience you ought to own and stand to: But I perceive that you are appointed by your officers to murder me; and I did not think that you had such heathenish and barbarous principles in you...when I stand up for nothing but what is for your good.

⁷⁵ *The Army's Martyr, or a more full relation of the barbarous and illegall proceedings of the court martial at Whitehall on Mr Robert Lockier* (London, 1649) p. 5.

⁷⁶ 'To his Excellency Thomas Lord Fairfax Generall of the English Forces' in *The Army's Martyr*, p. 13.

⁷⁷ A Plowden, *In a Free Republic* (Stroud, Sutton, 2006) p. 49.

Colonel Okey, in charge of the detail, accused Lockyer of still trying to ‘make the soldiers mutiny’. Lockyer told the firing squad that they should shoot when he raised both his hands. And so they did.⁷⁸

Lockyer’s funeral procession began in Smithfield and went by way of the City to Moorfields where he was buried in the New Churchyard. There were many serving troopers in the crowd. Seven trumpeters ‘sounded before the Corpse’. Lockyer’s horse, draped in black and led by a footman, followed the coffin which was draped in rosemary branches dipped in blood and had Lockyer’s sword laid on it.⁷⁹ This was an elevation of the ordinary trooper to the status of a ‘chief commander’. Some 4,000 to 5,000 were in the original procession, among them an estimated 300 soldiers and some discharged men. A company of women brought up the rear of the cortege. When the procession reached its destination, the marchers were joined by more of the ‘highest sort’ who stayed aloof from the controversial progress through the City. The funeral was watched by ‘many thousands of spectators’.⁸⁰ Black mourning ribbons and sea green ribbons, now recognized as the Leveller colours, were widely worn among the mourners.⁸¹ There were eulogies but no sermon in the New Churchyard. The speeches pointed up the Leveller programme and aimed criticism at the new government of Grandees. One of the Army’s defenders complained that the Levellers are ‘pleased to canonize’ Mr Lockyer as ‘a Martyr since his death...’.⁸² Some thought that Lockyer’s mourners outnumbered those for Charles I.⁸³ A little later in midst of the Burford mutiny, on Saturday 5th May 1649, two other troopers were punished for their part in the Bishopsgate mutiny:

two Troopers of Captain Savages Troop, according to the sentence passed upon them, rid the Wooden Horse, with two Muskets tyed to their legs in the Palace yard at Westminster, like true Champions of the Wooden Horse; mounted with much courage

⁷⁸ *The Army’s Martyr*, p. 10.

⁷⁹ *A Perfect Diurnall*, 30 April-7 May 1649 (London) p2469. *The Moderate*, 24 April-1 May 1649 (London).

⁸⁰ *The Moderate*, 24 April-1 May 1649 (London). *The Impartiall Intelligencer*, No. 29, 25th April-2 May 1649 (London) p72. E529[29].

⁸¹ *The Moderate*, 24 April-1 May 1649 (London). I Gentles, ‘Political Funerals during the English Revolution’ in S Porter (ed.), *London and the Civil War* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 1996) pp. 219-221.

⁸² *The Justice of the Army...* (London, 1649) p. 11.

⁸³ I Gentles, *The New Model Army* (Oxford, OUP, 1992) p. 326.

and valour, one of them said, he had served the parliament on a better horse, and that he had bestowed much money that way, and this was an exchange; but if he consider, it is better then his fellow Lockiers was.⁸⁴

Lockyer's funeral was, if anything, even larger than Rainsborough's. And it served the same function of rallying Leveller support, though this time in a moment of retreat rather than advance. Rainsborough's funeral occurred at the high-point of Leveller-Independent joint endeavour to prevent the re-enthronement of Charles I. The Rainsborough procession was Leveller inspired and organised but it had the character of a broad revolutionary front against the spectre of restoration. Lockyer's procession was a Leveller only affair held at a political moment when the mutinies in the Army were afoot, the Leveller leaders were in the Tower and the Levellers' erstwhile Independent allies were persecuting them. The iconography is important in this context. Lockyer's funeral had all the pomp that was traditionally associated with the cortege of individuals of much higher rank when he was of 'no higher quality than a Trooper'.⁸⁵ Perhaps this was an attempt to elevate the Levellers' standing at a moment of relative political isolation. Certainly it was an attempt to project their cause to a wider audience at such a moment. Ian Gentles believes that Lockyer's funeral would have confirmed the fears of Cromwell and the Grandees that Leveller agitation in the Army and London could threaten the new regime. And he notes that the funeral is a reminder that 'the use of mourning for a martyred popular hero as a vehicle of political protest was invented long before its contemporary exploitation in South Africa and Northern Ireland'.⁸⁶

The business of Burford

The 'Burford mutiny' is shorthand for a series of connected revolts by troops across the West Country in May 1649. They began in Salisbury on 1 May 1649 among Scroop's regiment. They were joined at a rendezvous at Old Sarum by Ireton's regiment, where they issued a joint

⁸⁴ *A Modest Narrative of Intelligence...*, 5-12 May 1649 (London, 1649) p. 42.

⁸⁵ *The Moderate*, 24 April-1 May 1649 (London).

⁸⁶ I Gentles, *The New Model Army*, pp. 328-329.

declaration on 11 May.⁸⁷ This objected to forced disbandment for those that refused to go to Ireland but framed these issues in general political terms. The soldiers objected to being deprived of ‘our Native Liberties’, of the Army commanders departing from the engagement at Triploe Heath, demanded the recall of the General Council with ‘Two Souldiers, chosen out of every Regiment’, referred back to the debates at Putney, and appealed to soldiers and civilians to support them. They reassured their readers, in the manner often used by the Levellers, that they did not aim at ‘Levelling your Estates (as may be suggested)’. The mutineers declared that they were unwilling to be sent to Ireland before they had seen the ‘Freedom and Liberty’ for which they had fought established in England.⁸⁸ The Royalist *Mercurius Pragmaticus* reported that the forces ‘in Wiltshire upon the Plaines of Salisbury’ were ‘a competent number and cry out violently for revenge, Professing to have the Blood of those who had the blood of Lockyer’.⁸⁹ The mutinous forces moved north through Marlborough, reaching Wantage on 13 May. The following day a rendezvous was held at Abingdon.⁹⁰ They were joined by more mutineers that included a troop from Harrison’s regiment led by Captain Winthrop, Thomas Rainsborough’s kinsman. Colonel Reynolds’ regiment called a rendezvous at their headquarters in Banbury. This was joined by Captain Smith’s county troop and most of Henry Marten’s regiment.⁹¹ Captain William Thompson was leader at Banbury. Thompson was a Leveller and a supporter of the *Agreement of the People* with a personal connection to Lilburne and Leveller printer John Harris.⁹² Thompson had already tried to raise a revolt at Towcester and at Coventry where he found the City gates closed against him.⁹³

As soon as the revolt occurred Cromwell called a review of his and Fairfax’s regiment in Hyde Park before heading West to confront the mutineers. Some appeared with the sea-green ribbon

⁸⁷ *The Leveller’s (falsly so called) Vindicated* (London, 1649) pp. 3-4.

⁸⁸ *The Unanimous Declaration of Colonel Scope’s and Commissary Gen. Ireton’s Regiments* (1649), *The Moderate*, 1-8 May 1649 (London).

⁸⁹ *The Moderate*, 8-15 May 1649 (London). *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, 8-15 May 1649 (London). I Gentles, *The New Model Army*, p. 330.

⁹⁰ F White, *A true relation of the proceedings in the businesse of Burford* (London, 1649) p. 2.

⁹¹ *A Modest Narrative of Intelligence*, 5-12 May 1649 (London) pp45, 47. B Manning, *The Far Left in the English Revolution* (London, Bookmarks, 1999) pp. 92-93.

⁹² W Tompson, *A True and Impartial Relation...* (London, 1647[1648]) p. 7. W Thompson, *Englands Standard Advanced* (London, 1649).

⁹³ *A Modest Narrative of Intelligence*, 5-12 May 1649 (London) p. 47.

in their hats and many announced they would not fight fellow soldiers. Cromwell railed against the Levellers but had to promise that any who did not want to fight could leave with their arrears. Most discarded the sea-green emblems and were reduced to obedience.⁹⁴ In all Cromwell left London with five regiments, two of horse and three of foot.⁹⁵ But even by the time Cromwell called a further rendezvous of his and Fairfax's troops at Andover on the 12 May he had to address them again promising to 'live and die with them' in fighting 'against those Revolters which are now called Levellers'. Some of his troops were still saying 'they would not fight against their friends'.⁹⁶

There was an initial skirmish between 100 of Cromwell's horse and '200 of the Levellers, and after a sharp conflict, the Levellers declining engagement, retreated towards Oxford'. Events reached their climax at Burford.⁹⁷ Major Francis White, who had been sent by Cromwell to negotiate with the mutineers at the beginning of the revolt, was with them drawing up documents to be taken to Cromwell in the morning when, at midnight, a body of horse under Cromwell drew up at the north end of Burford and attacked.⁹⁸ The only resistance came from troops with Colonel William Eyre, whom we have seen as a key Leveller figure at Ware: 'there was only one centre of resistance~the Crowne Inn, in the centre of town, where Sheep Street joins the High Street. Here Colonel Eyres, ex-Army officer and a friend of Henry Marten, led a desperate little resistance, during which one man was killed and two wounded, before himself being taken prisoner'.⁹⁹ Cromwell expressed 'much dissatisfaction' with White when the Major told him the violence was unnecessary.¹⁰⁰ The captured mutineers were kept overnight in Burford church where one of them, Anthony Sedley, carved his name and the words '1649.

⁹⁴ *The Leveller's (falsly so called) Vindicated* (London, 1649) p4. *The Moderate*, 8-15 May 1649 (London). P Gregg, *Free-born John* pp. 278-279. Also *England's Standard Advanced*, E553[2] and *A Modest Narrative of Intelligence*, 5th-12th May 1649. E555[8].

⁹⁵ *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, 8-15 May 1649 (London).

⁹⁶ *The Declaration of Lieutenant-Generall Cromwell Concerning the Levellers* (London, 1649) pp. 1-2.

⁹⁷ *The Declaration of Lieutenant-Generall Cromwell*, p. 3.

⁹⁸ F White, *A true relation of the proceedings in the businesse of Burford* (London, 1649) p. 7.

⁹⁹ *The Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer*, 15-22 May 1649 (London) p1363. Oxfordshire Record Office (Oxford), MS D.D.Par. Burford, c.1: Burford parish register of baptisms, marriages and burials. 1612-1715. This records 'a soldier slaine at y^e Crowne buried y^e 15^o of May' (15 May 1649). I am grateful to Ariel Hessayon for this reference.

R L Greaves and R Zaller, 'Eyres, William', *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century*, (Brighton, Harvester, 1984). P Gregg, *Free-born John*, pp. 280-281.

¹⁰⁰ F White, *A true relation of the proceedings in the businesse of Burford* (London, 1649) p. 8.

Prisner' into the stone font where it can still be seen. Cromwell had three of the mutineers~Corporal Perkins, Corporal Church and Cornet Thompson~shot in Burford churchyard.¹⁰¹ Cornet James Thompson was the brother of William Thompson. William Thompson himself briefly took refuge in Northampton, where he seized the magazine and distributed money to the poor. But in the wake of the Burford defeat he and a small band of followers were hunted down and he was killed while resisting capture. Eyre, because he was not formally commissioned at the time, was sent to Oxford castle 'to be proceeded against at Common Law'.¹⁰²

Cromwell claimed he was dealing with a widespread Leveller rising. He wrote that the Levellers planned to raise their 'standard of Sea-green Colours' in York, Oxford, Bristol, Gloucester 'and many other places in the West of England' and that they had actually made proclamations 'throughout the Counties of Oxford, Gloucester and Worcester'. He also noted Leveller claims to have 'great influence in divers Regiments of the Army' and that action had been taken against Leveller influence in the regiments of Scroop, Harrison and 'divers others'.¹⁰³ Certainly one contemporary report claimed 'The Agitators are now again in every regiment, and they carry out their designs dayly'.¹⁰⁴ There are grounds for these claims.

The Burford mutinies took place in the direct aftermath of Lockyer's execution and while protests were taking place by Leveller supporters in London to have their leaders freed from the Tower. The edition of *The Moderate* which reported the mutiny at Salisbury also reported a petition of Leveller women calling for the freedom of the prisoners in the Tower and denouncing the death of Lockyer as 'the blood of War...shed in time of Peace'.¹⁰⁵ In response the Commons ordered that the troops guarding the Tower be supplemented with loyal units and that the Leveller leaders be denied visitors and access to pen and paper. Cromwell was reported as saying that unless Lilburn and Walwyn were by some means or other taken out of

¹⁰¹ Oxfordshire Record Office (Oxford), MS D.D.Par. Burford, c.1: Burford parish register of baptisms, marriages and burials, 1612-1715. This records 'three soldiers shot to death in Burford churchyard buried May 17 (1649). I am grateful to Ariel Hessayon for this reference.

¹⁰² *Perfect Occurrences*, 18-25 May 1649 (London) pp. 1053-1055.

¹⁰³ *The Declaration of Lieutenant-Generall Cromwell Concerning the Levellers* (London, 1649) pp. 4-6.

¹⁰⁴ *A Modest Narrative of Intelligence*, 5-12 May 1649 (London) p. 45.

¹⁰⁵ *The Moderate*, 1-8 May 1649 (London).

the way they could not carry on their design'.¹⁰⁶ William Thompson had been a corporal in the same troop as Robert Lockyer in Whalley's regiment. The Burford mutiny had been preceded by a mutiny in a troop of Colonel Reynolds' Regiment led by Captain Bray, another Leveller veteran of Ware, in March 1649. Colonel Hewson's Regiment mutinied in late April and it was news of this that triggered the original revolt by Scroop's regiment at Salisbury. In South Wales 80 troopers from Horton's regiment set off to join the Salisbury revolt but turned back when they heard of the defeat at Burford. Three companies of Skippon's foot marched to Salisbury led by a Leveller Major but when they arrived they did not join the revolt though they pledged not to fight against it.¹⁰⁷ Rainsborough's old regiment attempted to mutiny at Minehead before embarkation for Ireland.¹⁰⁸ On the 27 April there was news from Haverford that 'the Levelling party, so called, are very active in these parts...the people and some of the souldiery comply with them, saying they hold out essential points for Freedom and Liberty, and desire to Center and Acquiesce in their proposals'. From Barnstable it was reported on 5 May that 'These parts complain much of want and misery. Much discontents amongst the Souldiery, who are so possest with the Levellers rational doctrines, that its feared, it will ere long...tell the Nation their affectionate thoughts thereof...'.¹⁰⁹ In Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight the Army had to 'fight with the Levellers'. There were reports that Captain, previously Cornet, Joyce was leading a revolt. Joyce it was said had 'sweld...from a Taylor to a Cornet, and from a Cornet to a grand Segnior amongst the Levellers, able in his thoughts to conquer Parliament and Army, with no longer a weapon than a Spanish Needle'.¹¹⁰ In Poole Lieutenant Colonel John Rede was accused of supporting the Levellers at the 'time of great danger when the Levellers rose in actual arms against the State' and of making the town a refuge for 'exorbitant Levellers and Ranters'.¹¹¹ This was John Radman, an agitator elected at Triploe Heath, one of the ringleaders of the significant

¹⁰⁶ *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, 8-15 May 1649 (London) pp. 27, 29-30. E555[14].

¹⁰⁷ B Manning, *1649: The Crisis of the English Revolution* (London, Bookmarks, 1992) pp. 201-207.

¹⁰⁸ C H Firth and G Davies, *Regimental History of Cromwell's Army* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1940) pp. 579-580.

¹⁰⁹ *The Moderate*, 24 April-1 May 1649 (London). *The Moderate*, 1-8 May 1649 (London).

¹¹⁰ *Perfect Occurrences*, 18-25 May 1649 (London) p1064. J Hackluyt, *Mercurius Militaris*, 22-29 May 1649 (London, 1649) p. 8.

¹¹¹ BL, Stowe MS. 189 f. 53, 'Articles against Rede exhibited by Poole, 29 March 1651'. See also in A R Bayley, *The Great Civil War in Dorset* (Taunton, Wessex Press, 1910) pp343-345. H Reece, *The Army in Cromwellian England 1649-1660* (Oxford, OUP, 2013) pp. 129-130. D Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* (Oxford, OUP, 1985) p. 235.

revolt in Oxford in 1649 where he distributed a Lilburne pamphlet.¹¹² Henry Reece has recently suggested that the accusations of Levellerism against Rede were exaggerations, the product the successful attempts by local worthies to remove him from office. But when Rede wrote to Cromwell in his own defence he made no attempt to reject the accusations of Levellerism and he not only sheltered Radman after the Oxford mutiny but also seems to have been on friendly terms with another Leveller agitator, Nicholas Lockyer.¹¹³

It may be, of course, that Cromwell was exaggerating the threat of the Levellers. It may be that he genuinely thought it to be greater than it was. Or it may be that the revolt, and the potential for the revolt, was indeed considerable and that this is what required the deployment of sizable military force led by Cromwell himself. Ian Gentles' account stresses the scale of the revolt. His estimate is that the 'total number of men involved in Leveller-inspired mutinies against the republic between the spring and autumn of 1649 was thus over 2500. The expeditionary force dispatched from London on 8 May was not twice that size'.¹¹⁴ Certainly the elaborate titles and awards showered on Cromwell in thanksgiving ceremonies in both Oxford University and Westminster seem to indicate that the traditional elites thought that a real threat had been defeated.¹¹⁵

The extent of army repression

The severity of the repression of the Levellers by the Army high command was debated in the wake of the Burford mutiny. The pamphlet *The Justice of the Army* made the case that the Levellers had got off lightly. The author deals with all three mutinies—Ware, Bishopsgate and Burford. And the pamphlet notes the cumulative impact of these cases when it says that the

¹¹² *The Kingdoms Weekly Intelligencer*, Tues. 18 Sept. to Tues. 25 Sept. 1649. E574[23]. *A Perfect Summary of Exact Passages of Parliament*, Mon. 17 Sept. to Mon. 24 Sept. 1649. E533. C H Firth, 'The Mutiny of Ingoldsby's Regiment at Oxford in September, 1649', *Proceedings of the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society* (Oxford, 1884) pp. 243, 246. R W Stent, *Thomas Rainsborough and the Army Agitators*, Vol. 2, p. 342.

¹¹³ H Reece, *The Army in Cromwellian England*, pp. 129-130. 'Colonel John Rede, Poole, to Oliver Cromwell, 18 June 1651' in F, Henderson, *Further Selections from the Papers of William Clarke* (London, Royal Historical Society, 2006) pp. 37-39. In William Clarke's letter to Rede he adds a final note asking to be remembered to Mr. Lockyer: BL, Stowe MS. 189 f.39-40. Both newsbook reports of the Oxford mutiny in the previous note say that Radman fled to Poole. It also seems quite possible, though unproven, that Rede might have left Poole, as his accusers say, to join the mutiny at Old Sarum in 1649 since it took place only 5 miles from his home at Birdlymes Farm, Porton, Wiltshire.

¹¹⁴ I Gentles, *The New Model Army*, p. 346.

¹¹⁵ *Perfect Occurrences*, 18-25 May 1649 (London) pp. 1063-1064.

‘misrepresenting of the Armies proceedings against’ Arnold at Ware has ‘been made use of to fit the Soldiers for, and stirre them up unto’ the Lockyer and Burford mutinees.¹¹⁶ The Levellers certainly made these connections, and connections with the plight of the prisoners in the Tower, when they demanded ‘to have justice for the Bloud of Master Arnold shot to death at Ware, and for the Bloud of Master Lockier and divers others, who of late Martiall Law were murthered at London: and also to stand for the preservation and deliverance of Lieut. Col. John Lilburn, M. Walwin, M. Prince, M. Overton, Capt. Bray, and M. Sawyer for their barberous and illegal imprisonments...’.¹¹⁷ They weren’t alone in so doing. Abiezer Coppe wrote that, though ‘Sword-leveling is not my principle’, the Levellers had ‘died Martyrs for God and their Countrey’ and that ‘their blood cries vengeance’.¹¹⁸

The Justice of the Army claims that the Ware mutiny had a widespread impact in the Army: ‘For if the circumstances of this mutiny be impartially considered, what a distemper it wrought in the whole Army, necessitating a generall Rendevouz to satisfy the Souldiers, &c...’. And it is the scale of the revolt which, the pamphlet argues, would have made most people wonder ‘that every tenth man of them did not suffer, then think such a storm could be allayed with the executing of one man...’.¹¹⁹ And in general the point is ‘How tender the ruling part of the Army hath been in taking away life by Martiall-law...there being not executed to my best remembrance, above five or six, besides these Mutineers’.¹²⁰

In each of the cases~Arnold at Ware, Lockyer at Bishopsgate and Thompson after Burford~the author finds little to recommend the victims. He notes the connections with the Levellers, especially in the case of Lockyer and Thomspson, who had been ‘bailed by Lieut. Coll. Lilburne out of prison’ in a previous encounter with the authorities.¹²¹ The pamphlet argues that just as the Presbyterians justified revolt when they fell out with the Army ‘...so now, let Souldiers commit never so great offences, as Arnoll aforesaid, and afterward stick a paper in his hat with

¹¹⁶ Preface to *The Justice of the Army...* (London, 1649).

¹¹⁷ *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, 8-15 May 1649 (London) p. 29. E555[14].

¹¹⁸ A Coppe, *A Fiery Flying Roll* (London, 1650) p. 11

¹¹⁹ *The Justice of the Army...*, p. 5.

¹²⁰ *The Justice of the Army...*, p. 1.

¹²¹ *The Justice of the Army...*, p. 9.

this motto, Souldiers rights, and Englands freedom writ upon it, and that must be like a Popes Bull to pardon all their faults'.¹²²

The pamphlet then goes on to address directly the Leveller arguments that there should be no martial law in peace time and that the Grandees have broken the terms of both Magna Carta and Petition of Right. In doing so it pays tribute to the Levellers' popularisation of these arguments: 'Truly, for Magna Carta and Petition of Right, I never read more of them, then what I have seen printed by L. Col. Lilburn.&c. in their papers, in which I have seen a great deal of opposition to Martial Law in times of peace, as in C. Brayes, Thomsons & Lockyers case...'.¹²³

The Justice of the Army clearly has a particular point of view. But in its account of the widespread nature of discontent and in pointing up the connection with the Levellers it is interesting, if partial, evidence. But its central claim about the relative leniency of Army justice is also worth discussion. If we listen carefully to Fairfax at Ware and to Cromwell addressing the troops in Hyde Park and Andover on their way to crush the Burford mutiny we can see that they are not wholly confident. They are keen to draw the sting of rebellion before, or as an alternative to, the use of force. Fairfax insisted in his declaration in the West Country that the *Agreement of the People* was being implemented piecemeal and that no one would be forced to serve in Ireland. Cromwell reprieved Cornet Denne at Burford and addressed the remaining prisoners in the church after the executions. In this context the reluctance to use higher levels of violence against mutineers may speak more of the widespread discontent and the strength of Leveller sympathies in the Army than of the forgiving nature of the Grandees. Certainly there is a sense that these are disputes, even if violent ones, inside the Army and that they are not to be dealt with in the same way as, say, the Royalists were after the siege of Colchester or that Cromwell dealt with the Irish. The language of martyrdom had been a powerful incitement to action from the time of Arnold's execution at Ware. Coppe, as we have seen, used Biblical language powerfully indicting the Grandees for having 'killed the just' and in so doing 'have slain me the

¹²² *The Justice of the Army...*, p. 14.

¹²³ *The Justice of the Army...*, p. 15.

Lord of life'.¹²⁴ The effect was cumulative, as *The Justice of the Army* was at pains to point out. The Grandees were careful not to add to the momentum more than was necessary.

The Leveller martyrs and the pattern of political persecution

The Leveller sympathisers who were killed or imprisoned during the English revolution have some things in common. Those who lost their lives all did so while they served in the Army. This is true of Richard Arnold, Thomas Rainsborough, Robert Lockyer, and the Burford martyrs~ Thompson, Perkins and Church~and William Thompson killed in the immediate aftermath of Burford. It is also true of the two soldiers, Piggen and Biggs, shot after the Oxford mutiny in 1649.¹²⁵ Of these only Thomas Rainsborough was killed by Royalists. The rest were shot as mutineers. Levellers mostly found themselves imprisoned as a result of writing, distributing or printing illegal pamphlets and petitions. This is true of Richard Overton, William Larner, William Walwyn, Thomas Prince, Elizabeth Lilburne, Jeremiah Ives and Samuel Chidley. John Lilburne's many imprisonments were largely for the same reason, although his imprisonment in Oxford after his capture at Brentford and for insulting MPs in 1645 and the Earl of Manchester in 1646 arose from other circumstances. Henry Marten's imprisonment was for calling for a Republic.

These facts point to the two great moments of collective enterprise in which the Levellers were involved in the course of the revolution: printing and army organisation. In mid-17th century organisations which involved elective affinity, rather than hierarchically enforced collectives, were rare and difficult to sustain. The networks necessary for the printing and distribution of pamphlets and the opportunity that military organisation gave for collective initiatives were invaluable. The intensive organisational efforts of the agitators in 1647 resulted in the development of their own printing press, pamphlets, codes of communication, systems of messengers and elected forms of representation. All these were influenced by (and, no doubt,

¹²⁴ A Coppe, *A Fiery Flying Roll*, p. 11

¹²⁵ *The Kingdomes Weekly Intelligencer*, 18-25 September, 1649, p. 1502. E574[23]. *A Perfect Summary*, 17-24 September, 1649, pp. 214-215. E533.

influenced the further development of) the Levellers. The authorities attention to suppressing Leveller activity in these two fields is testimony to this fact.

Then there is the dynamic which the unfolding revolutionary process imparted to this aspect of the Leveller movement. Lilburne himself understood the cumulative process by which the revolutionary camp had divided and that his opponents had been different in successive phases of radicalisation. In *The Innocent Man's Second Proffer* of 22 October 1649 Lilburne lists 45 of his own publications broken down under four sub-headings. The first 16 works, starting with *The Christian Mans Tryall* and concluding with the second edition of *The Just Mans Justification* in 1646, come under the heading 'Since his first Contest with the Bishops in the yeare 1637'. The next 13 come under the heading 'Since my Contest with the Lords'. The next seven are listed under 'Since his Contest with Commons and Lords joyntly, being Committed by them both Jan. 1647'. The final nine publications are listed beneath the title 'Since his Contest with the Council of State March 28 1649'.¹²⁶

An overview of the time which leading figures in the Leveller movement spent behind bars provides one important window on the political history of the movement. There are a number of significant points that can be made from this information. With the notable exception of Lilburne who found himself committed under every regime, most Leveller leaders were not imprisoned until the end of the first civil war. After that there are two peaks. In 1646-47 Lilburne is joined in jail by Overton, Larner, Prince, Samuel Chidley, William Bray, William Eyres and Jerimiah Ives. But by January 1648 most of the Levellers are at large and only Larner spends time inside during that year. Then in March 1649 the most severe crackdown on the movement sees Lilburne, his wife Elizabeth, Walwyn, Overton and Prince interned. In May they are joined by William Eyres. Elizabeth Lilburne was released in July 1649. The four prisoners in the Tower were not free until John Lilburne triumphed in his treason trial in November 1649.

¹²⁶ J Lilburne, *The Innocent Man's Second Proffer* (London, 1649).

William Eyres was not free until the following year. William Bray was imprisoned at Windsor from March 1649 to October 1651.¹²⁷

This pattern of imprisonment is significant because it roughly followed the contours of the Levellers' alliance with the political Independents. The first peak of imprisonment reached its height in late 1647 at the time of the Ware mutiny and its aftermath when the fissure with the Grandees that opened at Putney reached its climax. During the second civil war and the 1648 campaign against the re-enthronement of Charles I, climaxing in Pride's Purge and the execution of the King, the Leveller-Independent alliance was re-forged and the Leveller leaders were at liberty. When the Republic was proclaimed and the Grandees were in power the alliance was severed. In this period five key Leveller leaders were in the Tower under the strictest prison regime since Lilburne was first imprisoned in the 1630s. For the entire period from the first stirrings of revolt through the Locyker and Burford mutinies and the nationwide Leveller campaign against the new regime they remained under lock and key in the Tower. In the midst of the Burford revolt, on 12 May, the Commons voted that they should be denied pen and ink and that the four Levellers be detained 'close Prisoners, apart one from the other, within several Lodgings, in the Tower'. They were also denied visitors. In the prison regime at that time inmates were dependent on friends to bring them food and other necessities. When the Commons voted to deny them visitors Marten and Ludlow moved a resolution that they should be given maintenance so that they would not starve. Initially this was voted down and only after delay of three days and in the face of protest did the Commons relent.¹²⁸

Philip Baker has traced the phases of co-operation and conflict between Cromwell and the Levellers. Rachel Foxley has noted that the initial Independent-Leveller alliance fell apart in the autumn of 1647 because the Army leadership's willingness to negotiate with the King 'had sown suspicion among both army and civilian radicals'. Unity was restored because the King's escape and the second civil war produced a 'partial return of the army leadership to a closer

¹²⁷ C H Firth (ed.), *Clarke Papers*, Vol. I, pp. 411-412 note d.

¹²⁸ *The Moderate*, 8-15 May 1649 (London). *Journal of the House of Commons*, Vol. 6: 1648-1651 (1802), pp. 208, 210. Gentles suggests that the policy of starving the Leveller leaders was only halted after the revolt, see I Gentles, *The New Model Army*, pp. 335, 535 n. 99.

rapprochement with army radicalism'. She reads Lilburne's early imprisonment in 1648 as a result of his disruption of Cromwell's overtures to Marten and those promoting the Vote of No Address: 'Cromwell was trying to slice up the political spectrum one way; Lilburne another'. She sees the high-tide of co-operation emerging around the Levellers' 11th September petition. And while the alliance was broken in 1649 she does not see Burford as the end of Leveller influence, cautioning against accounts which see 'an easy and clean suppression of Levelling, or a sudden loss of Leveller influence in the army'.¹²⁹ At the end of May 1649 the Council of State sent officers scuttling back to their regiments to 'emmisaries sent among the men' from infecting them with the 'destructive principles' of 'Lilburne and his party'.¹³⁰ Certainly the regime continued to fear, and persecute, the Levellers after Burford and throughout the 1650s.¹³¹

The pattern of Leveller persecution underlines that fact that the Leveller movement had an independent political weight which was both an asset to the Independents in moments of co-operation and a threat in moments of conflict. This is important since although it is true that the Levellers formed part of the radical spectrum they also sustained a core of independent political organisation which should not be reduced to the surrounding milieu. The Levellers were part of a general current of radicalism, but to a unique degree they brought a level of independent organisational capacity to that milieu. They were at their strongest when they could achieve alliances with other sections of the radical movement, but even in relative isolation they could maintain a capacity to mobilise which the political establishment found threatening.

¹²⁹ P Baker, "“A Despicable Contemptible Generation of Men”?: Cromwell and the Levellers' in P Little (ed.), *Oliver Cromwell, New Perspectives* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) pp. 90-116. R Foxley, *The Levellers, Radical Political Thought in the English Revolution* (Manchester, MUP, 2013) pp. 159, 160, 165, and generally pp. 150-194.

¹³⁰ TNA:PRO, SP 25/94 f.193. and a further raft of measures on 18 Sept., 1649, SP 25/63/2 f.45.

¹³¹ See, for instance, TNA: PRO, SP 25/94 f.343, SP 25/95 f.91, SP 25/19 f.166.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to establish the extent and impact of Leveller organisation by examining the historical record. But no appeal to the facts can be conclusive on its own since every historical account depends on an interpretive framework. Contrary to the popular aphorism, the facts never speak for themselves. Every historical interpretation is in this sense under-determined by the facts adduced to support it. The revisionist critique of previous accounts of the Levellers relied not only on challenging existing facts about the scale of Leveller organisation but also on the use of a number of interpretive concepts that worked to invalidate liberal or left histories of the Levellers. Some of these concepts are very general: the claims, for instance, that liberal and left accounts of the revolution are teleological or that they employ terms anachronistically. John Walter claims that Marxist historians have done both: ‘At its worst this tradition replaced the teleology of class with the anachronism of democracy’.¹ These concepts were then deployed to make a number of more specific claims: that it was inappropriate to use the term ‘radicalism’ when referring to 17th century political currents because the term was not used in this way until the 18th century or that it was not possible to use the term ‘party’ to describe the Levellers since it did not have its modern political meaning in the 17th century. This all worked to effectively dissolve the Levellers as an identifiable movement into the general background of the godly supporters of Parliament. Two of the most recent surveys of modern scholarship make the essential point. Rachel Foxley argues that although the revisionist challenge produced some fruitful avenues of research its overall effect was to push the study of the Levellers to the margins of what ‘at its most extreme’ this current

¹ J Walter, ‘Politicising the popular? The “Tradition of Riot” and Popular Political Culture in the English Revolution’, in N Tyacke (ed.), *The English Revolution c.1590-1720, Politics, Religion and Communities* (Manchester, MUP, 2007) p. 100.

saw as ‘unrevolutionary England’.² Phillip Baker and Elliot Vernon note that ‘late twentieth-century historians argued that liberal and Marxist interpretations had over-privileged the role of the Levellers, and in particular John Lilburne, in the events of the late 1640s’.³ In this conclusion I examine the concepts deployed by revisionism both in their own terms and against the background of the evidence.

Teleology

In his sympathetic overview of revisionism Glenn Burgess argues that most accounts of the trend, and most practitioners of revisionist history, would agree that one of its defining characteristics is its opposition to the ‘teleology of whiggism’ and of Marxism. But he sees this ‘self-image’ as a ‘major weakness of revisionist work’. Burgess proposes making a distinction between two kinds of teleology. The first kind, ‘strong teleology’, involves the idea that ‘some end-point or telos was inevitable and predetermined’. This Burgess wishes to reject. The second, ‘weak teleology’, he wishes to accept because ‘an ineradicable feature of historical writing’ is that it ‘conveys some overall meaning or set of meanings, and it does this by selecting (from the vast and uncontrollable mass of actual events) a particular subset directed towards a chosen end’. Thus in order ‘to select the events relevant to their narratives historians must have some telos in view’.⁴ But redefining the term does not really solve the problem because ‘weak teleology’ is essentially a literary device.⁵ This can only result in an uncontrolled relativism: the end-point that historians choose will determine the historical narrative they relate. Better to reject teleology, or determinism, and think through the problem again.

We should be careful of importing philosophical terms into a historical discussion without careful examination. In social theory teleology is about using the analysis of the past and the

² R Foxley, *The Levellers, Radical political thought in the English Revolution* (Manchester, MUP, 2013) p. 3.

³ P Baker and E Vernon (eds.), *The Agreements of the People, The Levellers and the Constitutional Crisis of the English Revolution* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2012) p. 51.

⁴ G Burgess, ‘On Revisionism: An Analysis of Early Stuart Historiography in the 1970s and 1980s’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Sep., 1990), pp. 613, 615. G Burgess, ‘A Matter of Context: “Radicalism” and the English Revolution’, in M Caricchio, G Tarantino (eds.), *Cromohs Virtual Seminars. Recent historiographical trends of the British Studies (17th-18th Centuries)*, 2006-2007: 1-4 http://www.cromohs.unifi.it/seminari/burgess_radicalism.html

⁵ G Burgess, ‘On Revisionism: An Analysis of Early Stuart Historiography in the 1970s and 1980s’, pp. 613, 615.

present to be able to make statements about the future. Properly teleological systems, like Hegel's philosophy of history, contain their conclusion as part of their premise. They therefore postulate an inevitable unfolding of events to a preordained end. It would be teleological to say, for instance, that the Levellers represented a stage in the unfolding of the democratic idea that has reached its final point in modern liberal democracy, or socialism, or anything else. This meaning of teleology, however, will not survive the transition to use by historians. Historians know the answer to the question 'where did these events lead?' because they led to a subsequent historical period or to the present. So there is no meaningful sense in which a description of events in the past that is used to explain how we got to the present can be described as teleological unless the claim is made that the path taken was the *only* path that could have been taken. Few historians or social theorists make this kind of claim. So it is not a teleological statement to say that the Levellers did *in fact* lead to parliamentary democracy, or socialism, or anything else. The statement may be *false*. And, if it is not false, it surely must be proved. But it is not false *because* it is teleological.

Most historians have absorbed the point made by Marx that 'men make their own history...but not under circumstances they themselves have chosen'. They accept the idea that the historical choices that people make, and there are real choices to be made, are shaped by, but not determined by, the 'given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted'.⁶ In the course of this thesis I have sought to show that the rejection of the Personal Treaty with the King was not inevitable in 1648, but that it depended on the joint actions of the Levellers and the Independents.

Anachronism

It will be useful in this context to examine the notion of anachronism so often invoked in these discussions. It is said that the very ideas of revolution or radicalism in the 17th century, let alone

⁶ K Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* in D Fernbach (ed.) *Surveys from Exile* (London, Pelican, 1973) p. 146.

the idea of a political party, is anachronistic since these are the inventions of later centuries.⁷

Conal Condren says his own work ‘concentrated on the semantic residue of seventeenth-century England, and how it has been susceptible to rough treatment by modern scholars who, taking their own conceptual vocabulary for granted, have read it into the past. In particular, the terms radical, moderate, conservative, and their near relations left, right and centre have been used with a redescriptive insouciance that has anachronistically distorted early-modern debate’.⁸ This is a useful prophylactic preventing the too easy reading back of modern political categories into the history. But its overuse can blind us to emerging novel political characteristics in a revolutionary period. So let us consider some ways in which it is appropriate to use anachronism.

Firstly, warning of anachronism can be a way of avoiding perfectly legitimate trans-historical comparison. At a certain level of abstraction there are always parallels that can be drawn between historical periods. Ancient society may be more radically different from modern society than was the society of the 17th century, yet the revolt of Spartacus still resonates because many people still see, in the broadest possible sense, an antagonism between ‘them’ and ‘us’, between those with power and those without, between the rulers and the ruled. The issue is about the correct level of abstraction. On the one hand, if we are so concrete that we make every event unique then no two events, ideas or individuals can ever be compared. On the other hand, at a very high level of abstraction everything is the same. In fact, historical periods, and the radicals in them, are both continuous and discontinuous with the periods before and after them. The task is to say concretely and clearly in what ways they are the same and in what ways they are different. It is precisely this kind of uneven and combined development that Marxists claim is constitutive of the historical process which makes meaningful historical generalisations possible. Thus it may be a mistake to say that Gerrard Winstanley is a ‘Communist’ in the same way that

⁷ For an early revisionist statement see J C D Clark, *Revolution and Rebellion* (Cambridge, CUP, 1986) especially on the anachronistic use of ‘revolution’ pp. 38-40 and on the use of ‘party’ pp. 144-155. For a recent overview see A Hessayon and D Finnegan, ‘Reappraising Early Modern Radicals and Radicalism’ in A Hessayon and D Finnegan (eds.), *Varieties of Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century English Radicalism in Context* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2011). See also A MacLachlan, *The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary England* (Basingstoke, MacMillan, 1996) pp. 231-251.

⁸ C Condren, *Argument and Authority in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, CUP, 2006) p. 3.

we understand that concept today~just as it would be wrong to say that he is a ‘Christian’ or a ‘Democrat’ in the same way that we understand those words today. But it may be correct to say that he was all these things according to how they would have been understood in his day and that these meanings can have a mediated connection with these concepts in our day.

Secondly, things can exist before they have names. Gravity operated before Newton explained and named its dynamics. Blood circulated in the human body before Harvey discovered that it did so. In their critique of the nominalist approach in which ‘radicalism did not exist until it was named’ Hessayon and Finnegan point out that if we take this approach we could not use the terms ‘angelology’ (unrecorded before 1753), ‘anti-Semitism’ (unrecorded before 1882), a ‘homosexual’ (unrecorded before 1892), a ‘Neoplatonist’ (unrecorded before 1837), ‘numerology’ (unrecorded before 1907), a ‘pantheist’ (unrecorded before 1705), a ‘vegetarian’ (unrecorded before 1839) or, significantly, the ‘English Revolution’ (popularised during the 1820s).⁹ As these examples show it would restrict our ability to understand the 17th century if we refuse to deploy knowledge, and the terms used to describe that knowledge, acquired since the 1600s.

In this sense we know more about the 17th century than those living in it did because human knowledge is cumulative. We can therefore legitimately use terms that only came into use at a later date to describe things that existed without the same name (or any name) at an earlier period. When the Levellers said that political power could only originate in the people they might not have meant democracy in the modern sense of the term, but they clearly did mean something which was the embryo of that notion. This is not to deny that naming both defines more exactly and, to a degree, alters the thing named. But this should not carry us to the post-modernist extreme of imagining that things only exist through their names. As Alastair MacLachlan, a trenchant critic of liberal and left histories of the English Revolution, has

⁹ A Hessayon and D Finnegan, ‘Reappraising Early Modern Radicals and Radicalism’, p. 2.

written, 'language often limps after reality, and an absence of an authentic contemporary vocabulary should not necessarily inhibit historians from describing the phenomenon'.¹⁰

Thirdly, contemporary resonances exist because historical development is not linear. In his introduction to *British Pamphleteers* George Orwell made the point that the patterns of political development in the English Revolution later became so familiar that when we read the history now it is almost already known to us:

Today the whole process seems familiar, like one of the classic openings at chess. It is as though history, while not actually repeating itself, were in the habit of moving in spirals, so that events of hundreds of years ago can appear to be happening at one's elbow. Certain figures, arguments and habits of mind always recur. There is always the visionary, like Winstanley, who is persecuted by both parties. There is always the argument that one must go forward or go back, the counter-argument that the first necessity is to consolidate the position that has been won. There is always the charge that the revolutionary extremist is really an agent of the reactionaries. And once the struggle is well over, there is always the conservative who is more progressive than the radicals who have triumphed.¹¹

The issues of the 17th century revolution in particular are still with us, albeit in significantly altered forms, precisely because it was the first modern revolution. History chews the cud. It regurgitates and re-digests. The contradiction between property and democracy has constantly returned over the centuries since it was debated at Putney. Issues of national identity are never settled once and for all. They return in forms both related to and different from the past. The art lies in seeing where the continuity exists and where novelty has arisen. But such analyses are made more difficult by the blanket use of charges of anachronism which have the effect of erecting an impassable barrier between our past and our present.

¹⁰ A MacLachlan, *The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary England*, p. 246.

¹¹ G Orwell and R Reynolds (eds.), *British Pamphleteers*, Vol. I (London, Allan Wingate, 1948) p. 10. The last point is a reference to Swift's *A Modest Proposal* 'in which Swift~not a Catholic and not a Jacobite, but certainly an adherent of the losing side~puts in a word for the downtrodden Irish'.

Radicalism

The use of the term radicalism is a much debated case in point. Although the term ‘radical’ is commonly supposed not to have been in use in a political sense in the 17th century there is at least one use of the word by the Levellers. In the 1649 pamphlet *The Levellers Vindicated* the anonymous author is discussing the basis on which the Army entered into its engagements. The point is made that:

...the said engagement was radicall upon the grounds of common freedom, safetie and securitie to the Nation, and upon that account and to that end onely undertaken and solemnly made, and all righteous oaths, vows, and covenants are indissolveble and of force till their full and perfect accomplishment.¹²

This reflects the original meaning of radical as ‘getting to the root’. But there is also clearly a political dimension in this case: the agreements got to the root of the matter because they addressed fundamental political issues of ‘common freedom’ and the safety of the nation. And it was precisely this radicalism that made them ‘indissolvable and of full force till their full and perfect accomplishment’.

But even if there were no contemporary uses of the term radical in the 17th century this should not preclude the use of the term. As Hessayon and Finnegan note, ‘just because certain signifiers did not exist during the seventeenth century it does not necessarily follow that the phenomena were also absent’. And they list a number of other terms which contemporaries used to denote radical political activity: ‘Levellers were accused of seeking to abolish social distinctions and private ownership of property, of levelling men’s estates and introducing anarchy. They were also defamed as atheists, devils, mutineers, rebels and villains’.¹³ It was to this kind of derogatory designation that Henry Marten was responding in his unpublished defence of the Levellers. Marten notes that ‘there may be amongst them thieves, murderers, mutineers, atheists’ but insists that these ‘are no levellers’. And in typical Marten style he argues

¹² *The Levellers Vindicated* (London, 1649) p. 8.

¹³ A Hessayon and D Finnegan, ‘Reappraising Early Modern Radicals and Radicalism’, pp. 3-4.

that there ‘may be so among men of any profession’. Marten seeks to refute these accusations against the Levellers because he has found ‘so many stumbles at this block (whereof some are content it should be still, either to be kicked, or to become a countenance for their walking out of the road) I presumed to give one lift wt[with] a pen towards the removal of it, especially being thought not altogether un-read in that kind of learning’.¹⁴ These kinds of discussion demonstrate that 17th century writers were dealing with debates about radical political currents in some very recognisable ways. What the use of ‘radical’ and ‘radicalism’ does in this context is to provide a generic term for phenomena that were recognised by 17th century writers but described in other words.

This is not a minor terminological issue. Even a scholar as sympathetic to revisionism as Glenn Burgess has noted that it is the existence of radicalism that makes the events in England in the 1640s into a revolution: ‘There is nothing particularly unusual about either baronial revolts or religious wars, but there is something unusual about the English revolution~radicalism. It is this that has meant that it has never been totally absurd to see the English revolution as a revolution, comparable with those of the French and the Russians’.¹⁵ Philip Baker concludes that radicalism is an indispensable term to denote ‘the notion of fundamental change...not concerned with the process of superficial reform or amendment’.¹⁶

Movement, party and organisation

In this thesis I have preferred to describe the Levellers as a movement rather than as a political party. This accords with the modern distinction between highly organised, membership based organisations and looser campaigning organisations that are thought not to have the same ideological homogeneity or structured internal decision making processes. It is perhaps this sense of political movement which is captured by John Harris when he writes of ‘Robin Hood

¹⁴ BL, Henry Marten Papers, Add. MS. 71532 f.14.

¹⁵ G Burgess, ‘On Revisionism: An Analysis of Early Stuart Historiography in the 1970s and 1980s’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Sep., 1990), p. 625.

¹⁶ P Baker, ‘Rhetoric, Reality and the Varieties of Civil War Radicalism’, in J Adamson (ed.), *The English Civil War* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) p. 203.

and his Levellers' who are resolved to wipe Cromwell's nose 'with the *Agreement of the People*'.¹⁷ But before the later 19th century it is unclear that such a rigid distinction between 'movement' and 'party' was in use. In 1848 Marx and Engels, for instance, used the term party in the *Communist Manifesto* in a much more general sense, meaning a group or current in broad support of a relatively defined ideological position. What they did not mean was the kind of party that the German Social Democrats were to become in the last quarter of the 19th century with their mass circulation newspapers, membership structure, electoral campaigns and array of cultural and sporting associations. So, paradoxically, what modern usage means by the term movement may actually be closer to what, before the later 19th century, was meant by party.

It is therefore worth considering whether in this looser sense the Levellers can be thought of as a political party. The way in which people in the 17th century most frequently used the term 'party' in a political sense is still one of the definitions included in modern dictionaries: 'a person or people forming one side in an agreement or dispute'. This usage, especially in the heightened and divided political context of the English Revolution, already contains some elements of a more modern usage. It assumes some ideological agreement. It assumes some level of organisational co-operation. We catch something of the transition between these two uses in the trial of Royalist John Penruddock in 1655. In his defence Penruddock first uses the term party in the legal sense saying 'No man can be a Judge where he is a Party in the same cause'. But he then also goes on to use it in a more general sense: 'Colonel Dove, the reverend Sheriff of Wilts, who that the Jury might be sufficiently incensed, complaining of the many incivilities (he pretended) were offered him by our party...'. This refers to events during the rising for which Penruddock was facing trial and it indicates organised political activity by an identifiable group.¹⁸

This use does not assume stable membership and organisational structure, close programmatic unity or long-lasting organisation. The modern definition does suggest these attributes: 'a

¹⁷ J Harris, *Mercurius Militaris*, 17-24 October 1648 (London) p.26.

¹⁸ *The Triall of the honourable Colonel John Penruddock of Compton in Wiltshire* (1655), Wiltshire County Archives, MS. 332/265.

formally constituted political group that contests elections and attempts to form or take part in a government'.¹⁹ This definition is a little restrictive since not all political parties can or do take part in elections, and others would not see it as a primary activity. But with these caveats it is clear that the Levellers had some characteristics that approximate to this kind of political organisation. Over and above the notion of 'party' in its 17th century definition the Levellers did require their supporters to make a regular payment to the organisation and appointed treasurers to ensure money was collected. They met regularly with their supporters in public and in committees to carry on the business of the organisation. Office holders were chosen from such meetings. They issued joint declarations in the names of their leading figures, indicating a higher than usual degree of publically declared co-operation. They came to identify themselves by the name their enemies gave them, sometimes with qualification, sometimes neutrally or approvingly. They organised secret presses and produced prodigious amounts of ideologically coherent material in leaflet, petition, pamphlet and newspaper form. Tolmie notes that even in 'the earliest phase of the Leveller movement William Walwyn, John Lilburne, and Richard Overton made brilliant use of the unlicensed press to provide an articulate defence of religious toleration... This phase was essentially one of pamphleteering and propaganda, but each man had a distinct range of contacts among the London radicals and was able to make an organisational contribution to the inner core of the Leveller party. It is at this organizational level that much about the history and ultimate fate of the Leveller movement in London becomes clearer'.²⁰

There is something of this sense of the Levellers in some 17th century usage. In his memoirs Denzil Hollis referred to 'the Leveller party'.²¹ In 1655 a correspondent of Charles II wrote of 'the party of Levellers'.²² In 1649 the mercury *The Kingdomes faithfull and Impartiall Scout* referred to the 'further proceedings of Leuit. Col J, Lilburn, and his party' in Hartford.²³ In a later edition the same publication referred more directly to several Agents of 'John Lilburns party' that were

¹⁹ Oxford Dictionaries Online: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/party>

²⁰ M Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints* (Cambridge, CUP, 1977) p. 144.

²¹ See M Ashley, *John Wildman* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1947) p. 54.

²² R Scrope and T Monkhouse (eds), *Clarendon State Papers* (Oxford, 1767-86) Vol. 3, p. 273.

²³ *Kingdomes faithfull and Impartiall Scout*, 2-9 March 1649, pp. 41, 46.

said to be gathering subscriptions in Hartfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and ‘other parts’.²⁴ In 1645 John Bastwick was worried should John Lilburne’s ‘party grow a little stronger’.²⁵ Some of this usage is hostile. It uses the term party as a synonym for faction, meaning those causing unnecessary division. Henry Denne in his recantation of his role in the Burford mutiny, *The Levellers Designe Discovered*, says ‘I joined with that Party, deviding from the army’.²⁶ John Lilburne referred to his Presbyterian opponents as a ‘trayerous Party’.²⁷ But even here if we subtract the judgemental aspect of the usage we are left with the fact that those who used the term are identifying a recognisable and organised body of political activists. Thomas Edwards used the term ‘party’ at least five times in the 12 pages of the Epistle which opens *Gangraena*, part I. Elsewhere in the same work Edwards refers to ‘the Independent party’, the ‘Court party’, the ‘Malignant party’, the ‘well-affected party’. The Sectaries are routinely referred to as a party.²⁸

But not all usage was hostile. Indeed, when the Levellers replied to Denne’s accusations in the pamphlet *Sea-Green and Blue*, they repeat the word ‘Party’ but with a neutral usage.²⁹ *The Moderate* referred to ‘the Levelling party’ at the end of April 1649.³⁰ And in the following issue it complained of those that ‘exasperate their spirits against that party, called the Levellers’.³¹ In May 1649 Apprentices in the Cripplegate Without ward issued a broadsheet calling on apprentices in other parts of the City to do as they had and to ‘speedily choose out from among yourselves in your several and respective Wards four or six...cordial and active young men to be Agitators for you. And that you forthwith appoint Meetings in your several wards for better carrying on of this work...’.³² This immediately drew an anti-Leveller broadsheet from apprentices in the City’s Bridge Within ward claiming that Lilburne, Walwyn, Prince and

²⁴ *Kingdomes faithfull and Impartiall Scout*, 16-23 March 1649, pp. 57, 60.

²⁵ J Bastwick, *A Just Defence of John Bastwick* (London, 1645) pp. 21-22. E265[7].

²⁶ H Denne, *The Levellers Designe Discovered* (London, 1649) p. 4. E556[11].

²⁷ J Lilburne, *Plaine Truth without Feare or Flattery* (London, 1647) pp4, 20. Wing L2156.

²⁸ T Edwards, *Gangraena*, Pt. I, Epistle, and Preface (first page), pp. 49, 50, 52, 63, 68. And elsewhere in *Gangraena*, pt. I, pp. 56, 57, 60, 75. See also A Hughes, *Gangraena and The Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford, OUP, 2004) p. 315.

²⁹ *Sea Green and Blue, see which speaks true* (1649) p. 10.

³⁰ *The Moderate*, 24 April-1 May 1649 (London) p. 484.

³¹ *The Moderate*, 1-8 May 1649 (London).

³² *The thankfull acknowledgement...* (London, 6 May 1649).

Overton were ‘engaging in a fresh Party without any the least colour of Authority whatsoever’. This is clearly hostile usage. But in response the Cripplegate apprentices compared the Leveller leaders to Korah, Dathan and Abiram ‘who took unto them what party they could procure among the families of Israel, (as these do among the Regiments of the Army, and elsewhere)’.³³ This is clearly an approving use of the term. In his account of the Burford mutiny Francis White referred to the mutineers as ‘our party’ and more generally addressed debates that might mean that ‘our own party...may be taken into union’.³⁴ Again this is a positive identification. A 1659 defence of the Levellers talked of ‘a party of levellers’.³⁵ The 1647 *A true account of the character of the times* gives a brief history of the entire revolution almost exclusively in terms of the conflicts between the King’s, Parliament’s, the Presbyterians’ and Independents’ ‘parties’.³⁶

All this may still fall short of the modern notion of a political party, but it certainly conforms to the dictionary definition of a political movement: ‘a group of people working together to advance their shared political, social, or artistic ideas’.³⁷ And since even political movements exist on a spectrum ranging from loose and temporary single issue campaigns at one end to more party-like multiple issue stable alliances at the other, we can say that the Levellers were at the more party-like end of that range.

Alliances and constituencies

Revolutions, almost by definition, are a dynamic and fluid political environment. For any group the allies of one phase can become opponents in another phase. Every political grouping will seek support and alliances beyond its own core of adherents. This is true of modern political parties as well as early modern political groupings. Even today’s more monolithic and independent political parties ultimately depend at least in part on alliances and relationships

³³ *The Resolved Apprentices...* (London, 17 May 1649). The Biblical reference is to Numbers 16 in which Korah leads a revolt against Moses.

³⁴ F White, *A True Relation of the Proceedings in the Businesse of Burford* (London, 1649) pp. 8-9.

³⁵ *The Leveller; or, the principles and maxims concerning government and religion, which are asserted by those that are commonly called Levellers* (London, Thomas Brewster, 1659) in the *Harleian Miscellany* (London, Robert Dutton, 1810), Vol. VII, p. 45.

³⁶ N. LL. [John Hall] *A true account of the character of the times* (London, 1647). E401[13].

³⁷ Oxford Dictionaries Online:
<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/movement?q=movement>

which stretch for a considerable distance beyond their core membership. If we think of the modern Labour Party and its relations with the trade union movement, the co-operative movement and single issue campaigns like CND we can see this process at work.

In the history of the Levellers we can see them emerge as a distinct group from a network of such relations, and seek new constituencies in response to the development of the revolution. The gathered churches provide one broad stratum from which the Levellers emerged. It was a constituency from which they continued to draw support until a rupture at the very end of the revolutionary decade of the 1640s. The apprentices of the City, whose mobilisation was an essential part of the popular dimension of the revolution, also provided a constituency from which the Levellers drew support. Within this broad stratum the 'puritan underground' of secret presses was a far narrower, necessarily more organisationally formed set of relationships within which the future Leveller leaders co-operated. The divisions arising from the prosecution of the war produced other alliances. As the Independent 'win-the-war' party emerged the future Levellers were part of this radicalised group, forming relations that would be maintained throughout the decade. Later the revolt in the army provided a chance for the Levellers to connect with radicals in the New Model Army in an organised network of Agitators. It is unwise either to assert that the radicals in the Army were the simple tools of the Levellers or that they acted without Leveller influence at all. In fact some Leveller supporters were part of the radical grouping in the Army, others, notably Lilburne, had been in the Army and had a considerable reputation among the soldiers. But the radicalisation of the Army was not *caused* by the Levellers but by the far wider conflict between the Presbyterians and the New Model. The Levellers located themselves with considerable agitational skill within this conflict and accrued support accordingly.

Jason Peacey makes a valuable point when he says "That Lilburne and Wildman were seeking to create something resembling a 'party' structure has distracted historians from the fact that they

were eliciting much broader support'.³⁸ This is true and it is a point that cuts in both directions. Only something that is itself a distinct current can create alliances and solicit support from other political forces. There has to be a 'something' which is conducting an alliance with others. Foxley, while appreciative of some recent scholarship that has located the Levellers in the broader spectrum of radicalism in the gathered churches, the parliamentary opposition and the army, makes the point that this should not lead us to 'dissolve them into an undifferentiated part of that complex political world'.³⁹ This is an essential methodological point. The approach which Foxley criticizes runs the risk of producing the effect that the philosopher Hegel describes as 'a night in which all cows are black', meaning that it is impossible to differentiate the object of study from its background. Seeing the Levellers as both a distinct organization and as part of a wider network of alliances also enables us to see that all such political alliances were subject to the wider stresses of a revolutionary process. The long standing relationship with London's gathered churches was breached at the peak of the revolution. The degree of support among the soldiers rose and fell according to the course of the wider conflicts and the success of Leveller organisation. The critical alliance with the political Independents, from whose camp the Levellers sprang in the first place, was broken at Putney and Ware, rebuilt in 1648, and shattered irrevocably in 1649. What I have attempted to do is to properly and carefully delineate what the Levellers owed to their background but at the same time to demonstrate the ways in which they combined their influences in unique patterns and with a specific, original organisation that made an essential contribution to the outcome of events in the 1640s.

The shape of the English revolution

The impact that the Levellers had on the course of the English revolution cannot be settled by simply identifying them as a political organisation. Nor can it be settled by calculating the degree of support for the Levellers as an organisation, important though it is to accomplish this task as well. It can only be decided by examining the constellation of political forces in the English

³⁸ J Peacey, 'The People of the Agreements: The Levellers, Civil War Radicalism and Political Participation', in P Baker and E Vernon (eds.), *The Agreements of the People, The Levellers and the Constitutional Crisis of the English Revolution* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2012) p. 53.

³⁹ R Foxley, *The Levellers, Radical political thought in the English Revolution*, p. 6.

revolution and then calibrating the impact of the Levellers within this overall landscape. It is often the case, particularly in revolutionary crises, that a relatively small social weight can have a decisive political impact.

Since much of the revisionist case revolves around a critique of Marxist accounts of the Levellers it is worth outlining the foundational elements of Marx and Engels' view of the English Revolution. The first important element to grasp is that Marx and Engels believed that modern revolutions under capitalism and those that arose as the system was first establishing itself have fundamentally different dynamics. Capitalism both produces a more simplified social structure and the necessity of accomplishing a social revolution in the economic sphere and a political seizure of power at the same time. Early modern revolutions have a more complex social structure and can transform the system at an economic level over a long period while a transformation of state power is still a relatively temporally contracted moment.

Unlike workers' revolutions, Marx and Engels believed that 'all previous movements were movements of minorities, or in the interests of minorities'.⁴⁰ It could hardly be otherwise since, in Marx and Engels' view, these early modern revolutions established a new ruling class in power whose interests were opposed to the mass of the population. And yet there was a paradox, since these revolutions could not triumph against the old order simply by relying on the forces that the new exploiting class could bring onto the field itself. It therefore engages other plebeian classes in the battle on its side:

had it not been for [the] yeomanry and for the plebeian element in the towns, the bourgeoisie alone would have never fought the matter out to the bitter end, and would never have brought Charles I to the scaffold. In order to secure even those conquests of the bourgeoisie that were ripe for gathering at the time, the revolution had to be carried considerably further~exactly as in 1793 in France and 1848 in Germany...upon

⁴⁰ K Marx and F Engels, 'The Communist Manifesto' in A P Mendel (ed.), *Essential Works of Marxism* (New York, Bantam, 1971) pp. 23-24.

this excess of revolutionary activity there necessarily followed the inevitable reaction which in its turn went beyond the point where it might have maintained itself.⁴¹

This assault on the old order was therefore carried out under universalist demands which, though they resulted in the triumph of a minority, still held meaning for the plebeian forces mobilised in the conflict:

...side by side with the antagonism of the feudal nobility and the burghers (who claimed to represent all the rest of society), there was the general antagonism of exploiters and exploited, of the idlers and the toiling poor. It was precisely this circumstance that enabled the representatives of the bourgeoisie to put themselves forward as the representatives not of one special class but of the whole of suffering humanity. Still more...although, on the whole, the burghers in their struggle with the nobility could claim to represent at the same time the interests of the different working classes of that period, in every great bourgeois movement there were independent outbursts of that class which was the more or less developed forerunner of the modern proletariat. For example...in the great English Revolution, the Levellers...⁴²

As Christopher Hill long ago noted, Marx and Engels were careful not to overstate the degree of working class development: 'In both revolutions [the English and the French] the bourgeoisie was the class which found itself effectively at the head of the movement. The proletarians and those fractions of the burgher class that did not belong to the bourgeoisie either still had no interests separate from the bourgeoisie or still did not form independent evolved classes or sub-classes'.⁴³

Nevertheless, the necessary 'excess of revolutionary activity' imparted to the movement is what makes victory possible. But then a contrary dynamic takes over: 'It is the fate of all revolutions that this union of different classes, which in some degree is always the necessary condition of

⁴¹ F Engels, Introduction to the English edition (1892) of *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1975) p. 27.

⁴² F Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1976) pp. 20-21.

⁴³ K Marx and F Engels, quoted in C Hill, 'The English Civil War Interpreted by Marx and Engels', *Science and Society* XII (1948), p. 145.

any revolution, cannot subsist long. No sooner is the victory gained against the common enemy than the victors become divided among themselves into different camps, and turn their weapons against each other'.⁴⁴ Or as Engels elaborated:

As a rule, after the first great success, the victorious minority split; one half was satisfied with what had been gained, the other wanted to go still further, and put forward new demands, which, partly at least, were also in the real or apparent interest of the great mass of the people. In isolated cases these more radical demands were actually forced through, but often only for the moment; the more moderate party would regain the upper hand, and what had been won most recently would wholly or partly be lost again; the vanquished would then cry treachery or ascribe their defeat to accident. In reality, however, the truth of the matter was usually this: the achievements of the first victory were only safeguarded by the second victory of the more radical party; this having been attained, and, with it, what was necessary for the moment, the radicals and their achievements vanished once more from the stage.⁴⁵

One of the virtues of this account is that it provides the basis of answering the question that Hessayon and Finnegan ask: 'if canonical radicalism was as popular as Marxists and their fellow-travellers maintained, then why did so much of the ancient regime survive the English Revolution, why was there a restoration of the monarchy, what happened afterwards to the defeated radicals...?'⁴⁶ Part of the answer is that, on Marx's account, long term social changes were being incorporated into society in a way which did not require *social* revolution. And part of the answer lies in the fact that in the *political* revolution that did take place the radicals were always a minority working to gain only enough popular support to overwhelm their opponents. Once this was achieved both the solidity of the social and economic structure and the minority status of the radicals resulted in their rapid marginalisation.

⁴⁴ F Engels [and K Marx], *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany* (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1933) p41.

⁴⁵ F Engels, Introduction to K Marx, *The Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850*, MECW, Vol. 27, see pp. 506-524.

⁴⁶ A Hessayon and D Finnegan, 'Reappraising Early Modern Radicals and Radicalism', p. 21.

This approach also allows us to resolve some methodological problems posed by revisionism. Glenn Burgess summarises the revisionist critique of Marxism by arguing that it sees Marxism as social determinism, 'whig history with statistics', aims at a holistic account, and is reductionist:

This point is a simple one: if it is accepted that politics can never be 'reduced ' to something else or explained totally in terms of some other thing, then it becomes necessary to treat it, at least in part, on its own terms with its own irreducible patterns and structures.⁴⁷

There is a lot to unpack here. Firstly, the casual identification of Marxism with social determinism is contested, indeed rejected, by the intellectually dominant currents in the Marxist tradition.⁴⁸ Secondly, the claim is incoherent in its own terms. Either politics is 'irreducible' to other social structures or it is 'in part' explicable by a relation with other structures, but it cannot be both. Thirdly, Burgess violates his own method by going on to explain politics in terms of religion, which is to reduce it to another social structure. If it was a fault of some Marxist interpretations to 'write the social history of politics (politics with the politics left out, all too often)', as Burgess claims, then it must be a fault to write a religious history of politics with the politics left out.⁴⁹ Finally, what Burgess seems to be aiming for is an account which allows politics to have its own autonomy but to still trace its relations with other elements of the social

⁴⁷ G Burgess, 'On Revisionism: An Analysis of Early Stuart Historiography in the 1970s and 1980s', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Sep., 1990), pp. 609-610.

⁴⁸ There is not the space to rehearse this argument here but strong anti-determinist statements can be found in all the writers in the classical Marxist tradition: Marx and Engels, Luxemburg, Lukacs, Lenin, Trotsky, Gramsci. Deterministic formulations are most often found in the work of the revisionists (in turn of the 20th century Marxist sense) like Edward Bernstein and Karl Kautsky or in the Stalinist tradition. See among much other work: F Jakubowski, *Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism* (London, Pluto, 1976), J Larraine, *A Reconstruction of Historical Materialism*, (London, Allen and Unwin, 1986), E P Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory* (London, Merlin, 1978), P Anderson, *Considerations of Western Marxism* (London, Verso, 1976), R Dunayevskya, *Marxism and Freedom* (fourth edn., London, Pluto, 1975), G Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness* (London, Merlin, 1971), A Callinicos, *Making History* (Oxford, Polity, 1987), T Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right* (New Haven, Yale, 2011) J Rees, *The Algebra of Revolution* (London, Routledge, 1998).

⁴⁹ G Burgess, 'On Revisionism: An Analysis of Early Stuart Historiography in the 1970s and 1980s', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Sep., 1990), pp. 612,627. Burgess writes that 'I am not suggesting that I have 'proved' that religion is absolutely the explanation for the Civil War. But religious explanations do seem to have an integrative capacity not available to other approaches'. And although he hopes 'that those historians who have recognized the importance of religion do not fall prey to the seemingly innate human tendency to turn a good idea into a monocausal explanation' he provides no other and so the reader is left with only one cause with which to explain events.

structure. That is, to see politics as shaped by but not reducible to other social structures. Ironically this is exactly the kind of account which many Marxist interpretations aim to provide. The technical term in Marxist philosophy is a ‘mediated totality’ in which the relatively autonomous spheres of religion, politics, art, science and so on are seen as interconnected, but not reducible to one another. In this thesis I have tried to use such a framework to analyse what the political alternatives were that confronted the radicals of the English revolution and how the activities of the Levellers made a certain resolution of these dilemmas possible, rather than others.

The scope of this thesis has not enabled me to deal with debates about the class structure of early modern England or the way in which these classes were politically represented. But, leaving these issues aside, this outline of the *political dynamic* between the radical wing of the revolution and its mainstream representatives is helpful in locating the position of the Levellers within the general pattern of development in the English revolution.

The role of the Levellers

In the first place the preceding analysis suggests we should not be surprised to find a constantly shifting pattern of alliance and conflict between the Levellers and the Independents. Some historians have assumed only conflict and Philip Baker had recently issued a timely corrective to this view.⁵⁰ But we should be wary of exaggeration in either direction. The dynamic of the revolution in its crucial phase was produced by a relationship of conflict *and* collaboration between the Levellers and the Independents.

Secondly, the critical role of the Levellers does not depend on an argument that they actively represented a majority current in society. The nature of the revolution that emerges from Marx and Engels’ analysis is one in which we would expect to find a great deal of neutralism, where the Clubman phenomena or popular Royalism, for instance, should come as no surprise. The leaders of the revolution had to struggle with these opponents to convince a wider audience that

⁵⁰ P Baker, ‘A Despicable Contemptible Generation of Men?’ Cromwell and the Levellers’ in P Little, *Oliver Cromwell, New Perspectives* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) pp. 90-116.

they had a stake in the outcome of the war. The Levellers and other representatives of subaltern groups did not need to command majority support for their role in this project to be of importance. As Hill put it: ‘the radicals owed their brief period of significance to the political function they performed rather than to their own inherent strength in the country’.⁵¹ Nevertheless, this point too can be overstated. The Levellers needed to have a degree of popular support and capacity to mobilise it or their ‘political function’ could not have been exercised.

Thirdly, the balance of forces at the peak of the revolution magnified the importance of the Levellers. As Murray Tolmie has noted:

The Levellers were the most important gainers on the radical side in the wake of the polarization over toleration. With astonishing boldness, and with equally astonishing success, they were able to seize the initiative in organizing what Walwyn called ‘the generality of the congregations’ to respond to the conservative threat in London. At its most successful moments, in the spring of 1647 and the autumn of 1648, this movement was able to deflect the course of the revolution in England.⁵²

In the second of the periods referred to by Tolmie, after the Second Civil War, the Independents were confronted by a political stalemate. The obstinacy of Charles I and his Presbyterian allies in the parliamentary camp threatened defeat and counter-revolution. Popular discontent might feed this. Or it might feed the drive for a more radical solution, especially in the ranks of the New Model Army. Ireton and Cromwell neither wished to be pushed back nor forced forward. The Levellers provided a vital temporary ally. With their participation this deadlock could be broken. The Levellers brought an essential element of popular drive to the final phase of the revolution that defeated the King and the moderate parliamentarians. After this they became, for Cromwell, the danger that had to be faced down. If these be the times, then this was the organisation that was equal to them. But once that time had passed the Levellers could make no progress alone.

⁵¹ C Hill, ‘The English Civil War Interpreted by Marx and Engels’, p. 147.

⁵² M Tolmie, *The Triumph of the Saints*, p. 144.

Finally, we should be wary of reducing the Levellers to epiphenomena of the Independents' strategy. It was their own efforts which created a popular base, alliances with the gathered churches and support among the ranks of the New Model Army. They made their own arguments and novel practical and ideological interventions. They were a force in their own right. Like any movement they were weaker when alliances failed and they were isolated. But they knew how to seize a political moment and re-created their strength on more than one occasion. The revolution turned out to be one they could only half accept. And only when it was concluded did they fail.

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